SRI SARADA DEVI

HOLY MOTHER

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA

RAMAKRISHNA MATH
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G. V. Sarveswara Rao

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PREFACE

THE first comprehensive life of the Holy Mother was published by us in English in 1940 under the title *Sri Sarada Devi*. It ran into a second edition in 1949. As one of the items of its programme, the Central Committee of the Holy Mother Centenary Celebrations at the Belur Math Head Quarters resolved in 1953, to bring out a standard volume on the life of the Holy Mother in English, Bengali and other languages. The task of writing this Life devolved on Swami Gambhirananda. Accordingly, he wrote in Bengali the Life of the Holy Mother entitled *Sri Ma Sarada Devi*. This was published by the Udbodhan Centre, Calcutta, on December 27, 1953, the first Centennial anniversary of the birth of the Holy Mother. The learned author has left no stone unturned to make the Life exhaustive and interesting by incorporating as many facts and incidents of the Mother's life as could be gleaned from all reliable sources, oral and documentary. The main narrative is profusely interspersed with conversations of the Mother and, consequently, the book ably fills the place of an authentic volume on the Life of the Holy Mother.

The Central Committee had also decided that the English Life should be published by us. It was at the request of the Central Committee that Swami Gambhirananda himself translated the Bengali book into English. We are happy to present this book to the public as the fulfilment of a resolution adopted in August 1954, by the Holy Mother Birth Centenary Committee, Madras. The original intention was to publish this book during the Centenary year, 1954. But, mainly owing to the preoccupations with the Centenary Celebrations in the city, the plan could not be given effect to in time.

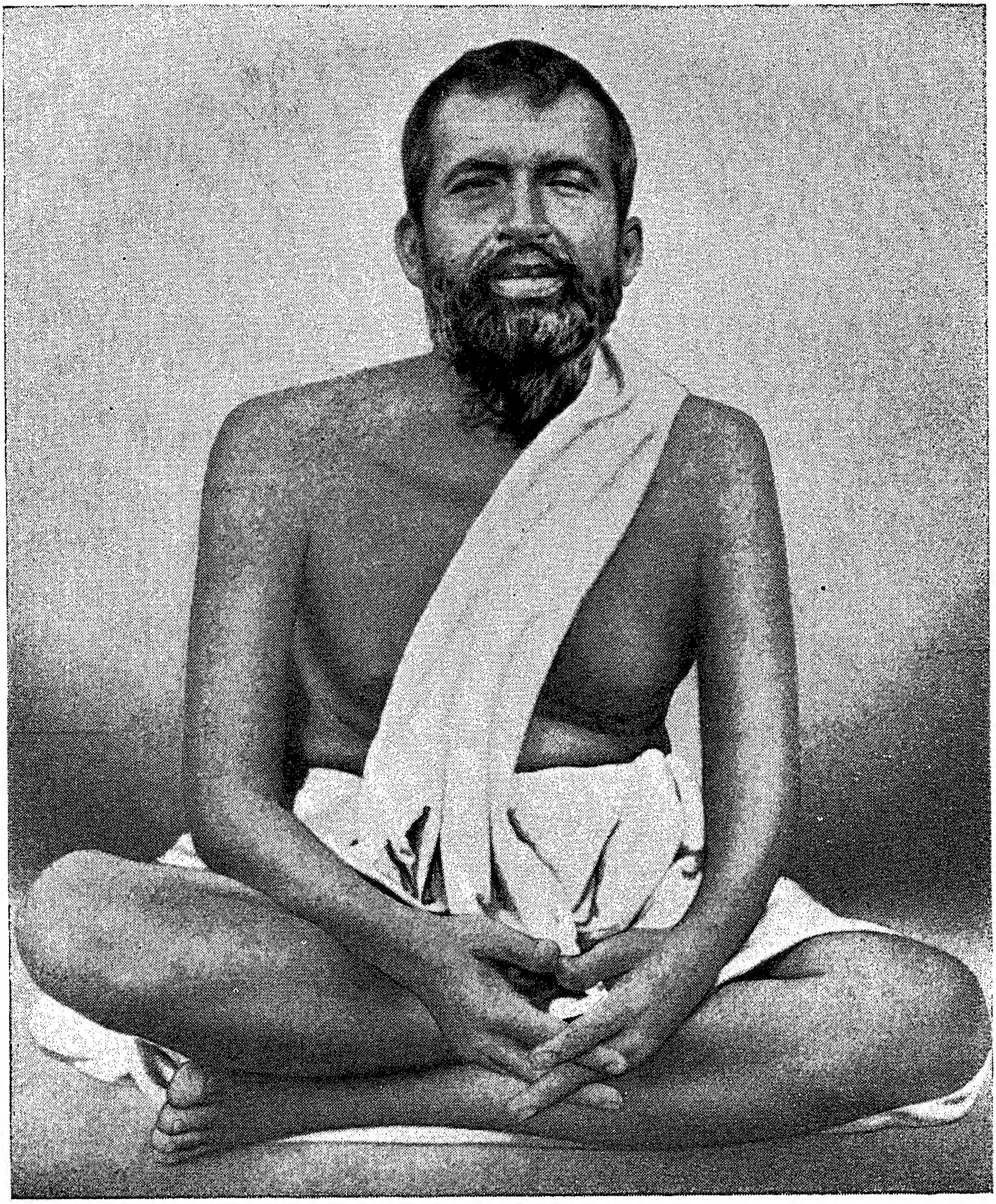
Some footnotes of the original work have been omitted from the present volume, and many have been added to

explain Bengali manners and customs. A few facts that came to light after the publication of the Bengali book have also been included in the body of this volume.

The life of the Holy Mother serves as a beaconlight lighting up the obscure pathways of spiritual life and as a fountain at which humanity can slake its thirst for a higher life. We earnestly hope that the interest awakened in the hearts of the public by the Centenary Celebrations will assure us a wide circle of readers.

We are deeply beholden to Prof. Sudhanshukumar Sen Gupta, M.A., PH.D. (Leeds) and Prof. S. Ramaswamy, M.A., for carefully editing the manuscripts of the book.

November, 1955 PUBLISHER.



SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

1

PRELUDE

God, as associated with His Power, is alone able to set in motion a new cycle of social and spiritual regeneration; else it is impossible to conceive of the Absolute Brahman as involved in any process of evolution. When God incarnates as man, He invokes this Power and then employs Her for the good of men. Divine Power, thus propitiated by the Lord Himself, becomes gracious and suitably rearranges the factors concerned for the advancement of erring and perplexed humanity. Not only this, when God comes down as man, Divine Power also accompanies Him most often as a woman. The descent of Sita with Ramachandra, Sri Radhika with Krishna, Yasodhara with Buddha, and Vishnupriya with Sri Chaitanya emphasizes this fact. In truth, Divine Power, whether on the spiritual or on the material plane, or as the consort of an incarnation, helps Him immensely in His mission. Divorced from Power, His divine drama cannot be enacted, nor can it be comprehended by us.

Swami Saradananda, writes, 'Having discovered the eternal association of Power with Consciousness, the Rishis of India worshipped in all exceptionally energetic things and everywhere the Deity Who dances on the prostrate body of Siva. This incomparable Deity Who promises both blessing and protection with Her hands at the same time that She wears a necklace of heads, was discovered by them as a reality and as such worshipped reverentially in the guru who is the spiritual guide, in women who fascinate the world and in such elevating and degrading qualities as knowledge, forbearance, peace, delusion, torpor, error, etc. Having thus themselves attained all that men can aspire after, they taught others how to be blessed by treading the same path' (*Bharate-Shakti-puja, p.*20).

Again, Swami Vivekananda realized that this Sakti (Divine Power) had been awakened by Sri Ramakrishna

for the rejuvenation of the present age; and hence he sent forth this clarion call: 'Just imagine in your mind the acme of that resurgence with whose first stirrings the whole world is now resounding, and give up all vain doubt and weakness to which slave nations easily succumb.' That formless and eternal Power of Brahman which inheres in everything has again descended as the consort of the incarnation for the present age. She has on the one hand helped Him to fulfil His mission, and on the other has spread Her influence on various fields of human relationships, thereby removing obstacles and setting India, and, along with her, the whole world, on a new road to progress. Therefore it is that Swami Vivekananda who was blessed by them both, salutes them thus: 'A slave am I to both of you; and to both do I prostrate myself.'

Not only has the descent of God a particular technique of its own, but the manifestation of His Power also has its own mode. Or to put it otherwise, though the time and the purpose are the same for the incarnation of God and His Power, which are inseparable like fire and heat, yet the objective is attained through the masculine body in one way and through the feminine in another. Thus it is that even though the entity cannot be split up, there is a special value in following separately the events that accompany the feminine counterpart.

In the *Chandi* (XI. 54–55) the Goddess says: 'Whenever there arises any obstacle from the demons, I shall come down in this way to destroy the enemy'. In olden times there was constant need for destroying the demons, as they oppressed good and bad men alike. Their destructive power is not however confined to the physical plane. The constant conflict that rages in human hearts between good and evil tendencies is also described in the Upanishads as a battle waged by the demons against the forces of goodness. In the present age, this struggle has assumed the form of a challenge thrown out by disbelief, materialism, and sensuality to belief in

God, faith in the immortality of the soul, and adherence to godliness. It is in consequence of this challenge that there has been a growth of irreligion, envy, enmity, and passion which are a constant source of war resulting in the loss of innumerable valuable lives.

The conflict on the psychological plane in the modern age is even more devastating than the old mythological war between the gods and the demons. The old antagonism seldom overstepped the limits of the physical world; but the present struggle has originated in the mental plane and is spreading to all spheres of everyday life, thus laying the axe at the very root of humanity. Hence the action of the Divine Power under existing circumstances has to be mainly on the mental plane. Above everything else, the present-day world needs moral progress and spiritual enlightenment. If faith, purity, and devotion can once attain supremacy, the outer world is bound to change. The incarnate Divine Power is, therefore, now engaged in fighting internal enemies. The victory may come either by liquidating the sinner together with his sin or by transforming him through the natural attraction of genuine good feelings. The conversion of a heinous heart through moral excellence, presupposes a greater strength than is necessary for killing an enemy outright. So in the present incarnation there is no clanging of weapons or the din of war; but there is an abundance of modesty, humility, purity, goodness, practical love, and spiritual experience. Moreover, the Deity has not only to remove obstacles. She has also to establish new goals and create fresh aspirations; and this is a tremendous task. God Himself need not come down for removing all hindrances from the path of His devotees. This can be accomplished by an inspired soul or by a partial divine manifestation. As the whole of humanity has to be raised to a higher pitch of realization, Divine Power Herself takes the field.

The emergence of the Divine Power today on the hoary background of Indian culture is indicative of a unique reanimation. Particularly is it bound to be so

among women, the need of whose advancement is admitted on all hands. We cannot do better than echo the words of Swami Vivekananda who was convinced that India cannot prosper without revitalising her womanhood, just as a bird cannot fly with one wing: 'And therefore it is that when God incarnated as Sri Ramakrishna, he worshipped God as Kali, the Mother, accepted a woman as his guru (spiritual guide), assumed the role of a woman in some of his spiritual strivings, took upon himself the responsibility of educating and training his own wife, and preached the Motherhood of God'.

In the middle of the last century the womanhood of India was faced with a tremendous problem. India then was being swept off her feet by foreign ideals. A craze for imitating the West set in at the cost of indigenous values. The plan of educational reform envisaged in the despatch of Sir Charles Wood, dated 19th July, 1854, gave only a vague indication of the kind of training that Indian women would get. True it is that India was not entirely wrong in welcoming foreign ideas and practices. On the contrary, it is quite in keeping with Indian tradition to enrich her life by assimilating foreign ideas while still retaining her own individuality. There is need for energizing our womanhood by drawing a little on foreign sources in order to make national life more vigorous and fruitful, at the same time that the West also learns something of our veneration for motherhood, so that Western civilization may have a stronger spiritual basis and a longer lease of life. But though each civilization has much to learn from another, it will spell disaster if the basic distinctions are ignored. For, though women are honoured everywhere, that honour very often appears in the form of chivalry and appreciation of feminine charms. But India eulogizes chastity and motherhood, since the ideal aimed at is spiritual freedom which has for its foundation absolute self-control. Our ideal specimens of womanhood are Sita, Savitri, and Damayanti. There is an evident conflict between the two standpoints; and

future world civilizations have either to choose sides or seek a rational rapprochement. The problem has assumed an urgency which it never had a hundred years ago. And yet the forces governing the destiny of India foresaw that unless Indian culture was saved from the deluge of modern ideas, the world would have no sure foundation on which the future Eastern and Western social edifices could be erected, while allowing for individual differences. There was need for providing a dependable model in the combined figure of guru, mother and deity from which all could draw the necessary inspiration.

Considered from all points of view, this task of resuscitating and perfecting the Indian ideal could be accomplished by none other than the Mother of the Universe Herself; for in the middle of the last century no other force could succeed in making India conscious of her grand destiny and the world cognizant of her revitalizing message. This is the age-old tradition of India's spiritual ministry. Truly God's advent has been strictly in proportion to the moral degradation during the period beginning from the eighteen fifties and ending with the nineteen twenties. The greater the degradation the greater is the Divine Power's response to the challenge of the times. The new advances of world civilization will commence with the worship of the guru, mother, and goddess as manifested in the recent past.

Sri Krishna hints in the *Gita*, that though God descends to the human world for the general good, men through the poverty of their intellect fail to gauge His real stature, hidden as He remains under His assumed mundane limitations. And thus, paradoxically enough, the conditions of Divine descent were frustrating His gracious intention. Notwithstanding this drawback, it is only through those human bodies that God can reveal to erring and suffering humanity the means by which life can be made divine; for sunk as men are in their petty selfish pursuits, there is no other method for reinvigorating them for higher achievements. This transmission of fresh vigour and

the communication of revitalizing power may follow different channels. In some cases the highest perfection of human ideals may be visibly demonstrated or they may be made more sublime and enduring through achievements of personal life or through grandeur of instruction; in other cases new paths may be opened up by divine decree; while in still others, human hearts may be more powerfully attracted towards cherished traditional human norms through charming divine disports. While all this is true, we must not jump to the conclusion that the mission of an incarnation is confined to a mere heightening of sublimity, or the establishment of fresh ideals, or the attraction of human hearts. For, though we may try to understand his contribution analytically, we have to remember that it is beyond human capacity fully to comprehend or formulate in words the significance of an incarnation, inasmuch as he is the embodiment of all kinds of spiritual moods. Besides, a power that is released for ages, cannot be assessed by contemporary history. Nevertheless, we accept these three standards as a basis for an intellectual apprehension of the life of the Holy Mother, wherein we shall see the qualities of motherhood in their superhuman perfection, and we shall come to know how they acted in the present age for evolving new spiritual values. We shall also see how in her life the feminine virtues consequent on such positions in the family as daughter, sister, wife, or matron, reached their ideal states, and above all, how her pristine purity was itself an inspiration to others.

Is this all sentimental ebullition or a faint hint at reality? We invite the reader to raise this question again after finishing this biography; but we are convinced that he himself will discover the truth ere long and be freed from doubt. But he must be forewarned that the life we are dealing with is in many respects extraordinary, and it must be evaluated accordingly. The Holy Mother does not belong to that class of dazzling personalities who suddenly emerge in contemporary history and after assuming

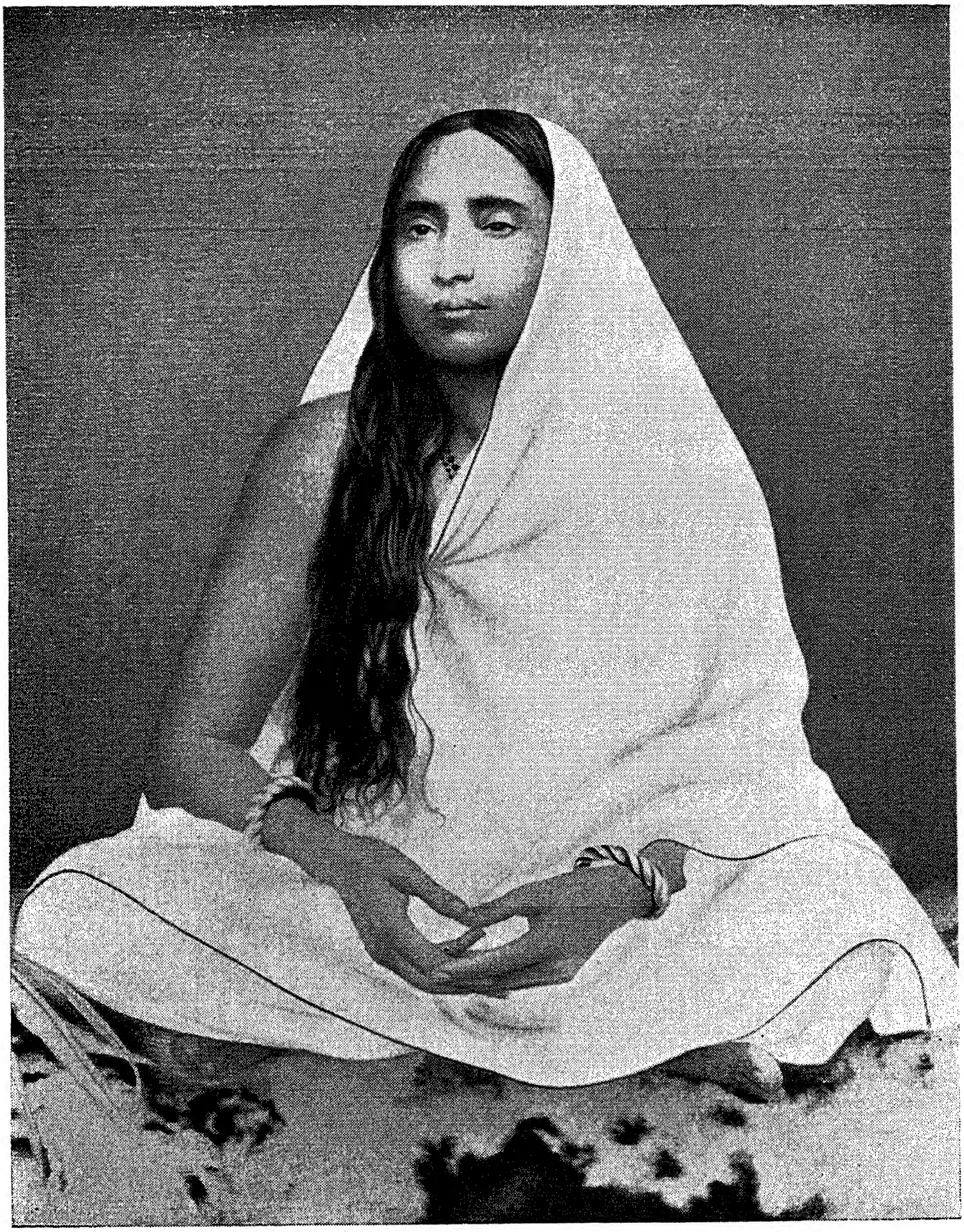
superhuman proportion for a while vanish for ever, nor to that category of people who through bustling activity, flaming oratory, or the clatter of arms imperil human civilization and blacken history for ever. She belongs to that galaxy of great characters who by concretizing the human ideals in their lives raise world civilization to a higher level and whose influence, though seemingly inconsiderable to their contemporaries, lasts longer and expands for ever. In fact, she is to be classed with such memorable figures as Sati and Sita whose advent purified human life and blazed the path for a fresh resurgence.

All this is unquestionable. But still another question remains: 'If the Power descended for the world as a whole, why should it have selected for its field an insignificant remote hamlet like Jayrambati, detached as it is from all modern influences?' Who can answer such a question? And, in fact, how many of those questions can we answer that arise in connection with the unpredictable movements of that inscrutable Power that ever creates, sustains, and dissolves the world? And yet human intellect, though aware of its limitations, cannot desist from the quest. So we cogitate, 'Had Jayrambati any speciality, because of which it had such a proud privilege?' Even a close scrutiny does not reveal any such, though the pages of history bear witness to the facts of Krishna's advent in Kamsa's prison and his childlike and boyish disports among cowherds, of Jesus's birth in a stable and his early training in a carpenter's house, and the descent of Ramakrishna in a husking shed and his subsequent life as a poor temple priest. And sociology points to the fact, that when under the impact of an aggressive foreign culture, the learned and moneyed classes in the towns are swept off their feet, indigenous culture maintains a precarious existence in the poor surroundings of remote villages. Moreover, Indian culture discovered a peculiar mode of self-perpetuation by entrusting itself into the hands of indigent Brahmins and penniless gurus. Had Jayrambati these factors in abundance?

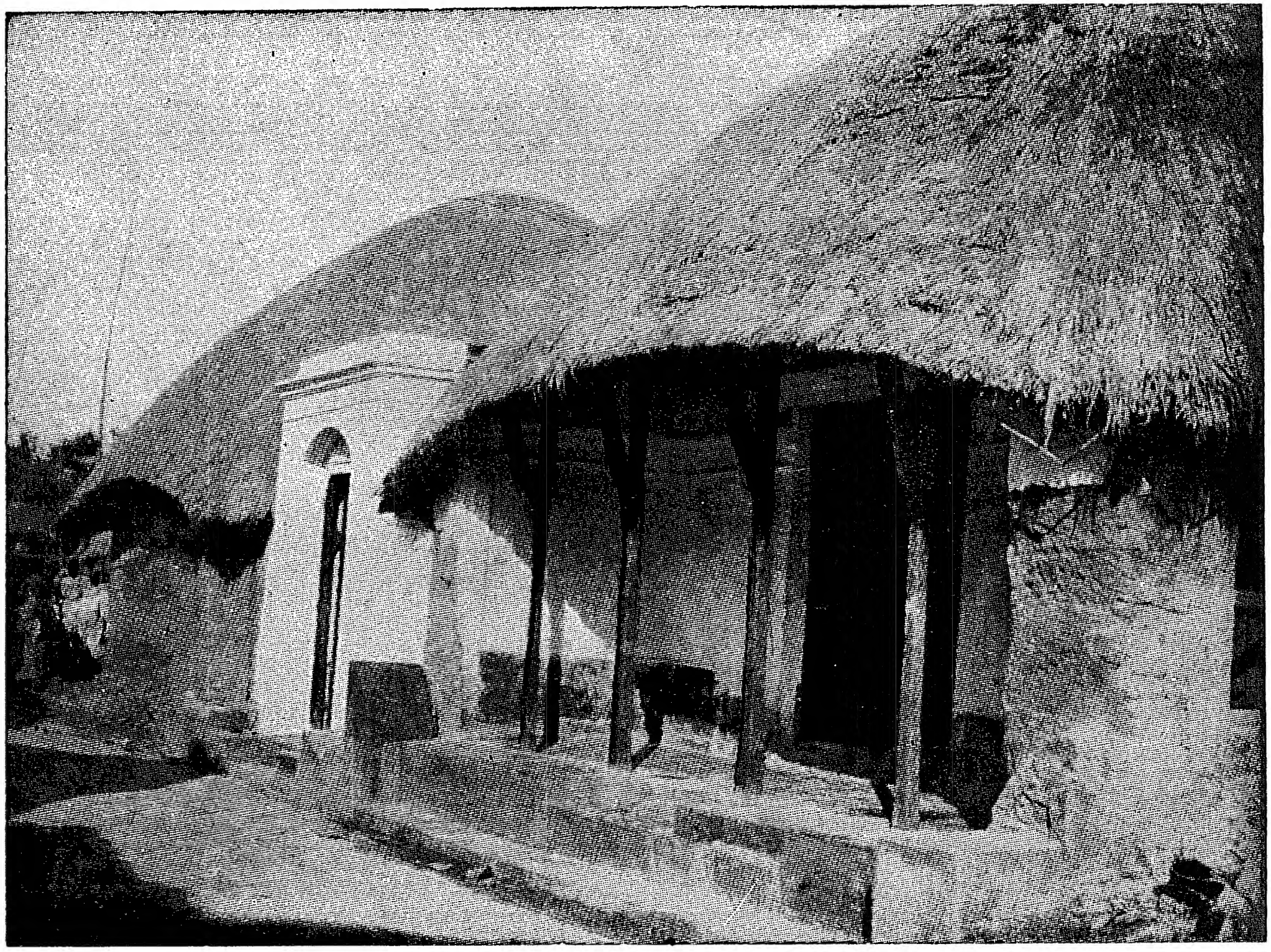
2

THE BLESSED HAMLET

Bankura, though it belongs to the fertile province of West Bengal, is comparatively barren and subject to frequent famine. But the little village of Jayrambati, lying at the south-east corner of the district, is more fortunate and ever smiles with the crops of paddy, wheat, sugar-cane, and vegetables which the industrious farmers grow in its fields. It is about three miles west of Kamarpukur, the native village of Sri Ramakrishna, and is under the Siromanipur outpost of the main police station at Kotulpur within the Vishnupur sub-division of the District. From the north-western corner of the hamlet the small, perennial rivulet Amodar, with its transparent water, meanders eastward for a mile like a playful child, demarcating the northern limits of Jayrambati; then taking a south-easternly turn it washes the boundary of Mukundapur which forms a part of Kamarpukur, and then flows southward. The narrow and shallow stream forms whirpools here and there, which are deep and full of fish, so that small alligators are often attracted there. In the northern side of the village, the streamlet forms a beautiful peninsula, triangular in shape and raised in the centre. The green grass and tall trees which cover it make it a cool retreat for those who want a shelter from the day's heat, and the solitude is heightened by the signs of cremation here and there, inviting those who are sick of the worries of the world. Resounding with the chirping of birds and decorated with fruit and flower trees as it was, it was a favourite place for Swami Saradananda, Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and others who after a dip in the brook sat under the *amalaka* (*emblic myrobalan*) tree which adorned its centre in those days; and there they meditated or read the *Gita* or the *Chandi* for a considerable time. The Mother in her younger days took her ceremonial bath in this stream on special days.



THE HOLY MOTHER



HOLY MOTHER'S PARENTAL HOME AT JAYRAMBATI

The natural situation of Jayrambati is very fine. It is surrounded almost on all sides by extensive fields. The land between the Amodar and the village is about half a mile in width and is very fertile. Such staple crops as paddy, pulses, chilli, and turmeric, as well as ordinary vegetables, are raised on this and adjacent lands by a diligent peasantry whose wants are few. Cotton, too, used to be cultivated and the ponds had plenty of fish. It is said that the hamlet began to have such abundance only after the birth of the Holy Mother. It had then no shops; and yet the people did not depend on other villages. They were satisfied with what they got from their fields. Whenever necessity arose, they went to the market at Kamarpukur which supplied them with sweets, or to Kotulpur, six miles to the north, from where they got clothes, salt and spices, or to Kayapat-Badanganj, five or six miles to the south-west. At Shihar (or Shiod, as it is locally pronounced), one mile to the west, there were some grocer's shops, and there was another at Pukure, about a mile and a half away, which helped the people of Jayrambati in an emergency. North of Jayrambati, on the other side of the Amodar and across a vast field, is a large village called Desra (pronounced as Deshda). On the east, too, across a vast stretch of paddy fields, one comes to the bank of the Amodar, after crossing which one has to pass through Amarpur to reach Kamarpukur. The track has now been made wider and easier for traffic, and it is dotted on either side by big shady trees under which the cow-boys and pedestrians can take rest or shelter.

The Mukhopadhyaya (or briefly Mukherji) family in which the Holy Mother was born, settled in this village long ago. Apart from these Mukherjis and the Banerjis who are related to the former, there is no Brahmin family there. The rest of the villagers are non-Brahmins bearing such family titles as Vishwas, Mandal, Ghosh, and Samui. The Brahmins, together with a few families of milkmen, one of barbers, one of sweetmeat makers, one of

blacksmiths, and a few families of Bagdis, inhabit about a hundred small mud houses where they live their unostentatious rural life. We are not aware of any indisputable theory about the origin of the name of the village, though one may guess that it might have been derived from the name of the tutelary deity or of an ancestor of the Mukherjis.

The villagers used to bathe in and draw their drinking water from the big tank with tall palm trees on its banks called the Badujye-pukur (or the tank of the Banerjis) in the southern part of the village. Further south there is an ancient tank with blooming lotuses. On the western side of the village is a big tank called the Aher on which the cultivators depend for water for irrigation. An old pond, called the Punya-pukur, occupies a central position. On its western bank is the 'new house' of the Holy Mother, built in 1916. On that bank again at the northern side is a small thatch opening to the south which is the old chapel of the Mukherjis. In one of its rooms there is an emblem of the deity Dharma[1] called Sundara-Narayana, which is of the form of a tortoise and which the Mukherjis worship by turns. The other room is called the Kali-mado where the goddess Kali used to be worshipped every year. This worship ceased subsequently as a result of family differences. In this room, again, sat the village school where the little boys and girls gathered, with leaves for writing under their arms and crisp scorched rice (*mudi*) for tiffin tied at the ends of their clothes. At the north-east corner of this room was a black-stone, the emblem of the goddess Shashthi who grants children to worshippers and protects them. Newly married couples used to come to salute this deity; and we fancy that Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother, too, did so. Shashthi now sits in Sundara-Narayana's room. On the southern side of the village road that runs over the southern bank of the Punya-pukur is the Modal-pada, the quarter of the

1. Literally, virtue or right norm, deified in Buddhism.

Modals; and to the south of this place is the shrine of Simhavahini[1] who along with two of her female companions —Chandi and Mahamaya—occupies a seat, a separate seat being provided for Manasa, the serpent goddess. The Mukherjis are the hereditary priests of all these deities. At the time that we are writing of, Simhavahini was housed in a thatch; but now she sits in a more substantial house with a cement floor and a corrugated iron sheet roof.

On the southern bank of the Punya-pukur is the homestead of the Banerjis. From the old brick-built temple, parlour, etc., it can be inferred that they were once in an affluent state. But now all these are in ruins.

The main road of the village runs north and south by the western side of the Mother's new house and the Kali shrine, both of which are on the Punya-pukur. As we proceed along this road a little northward, there stands on our left the white brick-built temple on the birth-place of the Mother. Here was the ancestral home of the Mukherjis who, however, spread out south-west with the growth of the family. Their houses lie to the west of the village road and open to the east. The ancient homestead had a thatch on the eastern side, which was divided into two parts, the outer one serving as a drawing-room. On the south were the kitchen and husking sheds. On the southern side of the present dwellings of the Mukherjis there is another road which, starting from the main village road, runs westward along the northern bank of the Kalu-gede (or Kalu's pond) and the southern side of the Ghosh-pada (Ghosh quarter) to join the road to Shihar on the northern bank of the Aher. On the extreme west of the Ghosh-pada is the brick-built temple of Dharma, known as Yatra-siddhi-raya, whose symbol is a small low stool with four legs.

Of the villages round about Jayrambati, with which the memories of Sri Ramakrishna or the Holy Mother are specially associated, mention may be made of Shihar, Koal-

1. i. e. one riding on a lion, an epithet of Durga.

para, Anur, and Shyambazar. At Shihar was married Hemangini Devi, the daughter of the paternal aunt of Sri Ramakrishna. It is also the birth-place of Shyama-sundari Devi, the mother of the Holy Mother. These common ties often attracted both the Master and the Mother to this village even from their childhood. The Mother used to halt at Koalpara when in later days, she passed through Vishnu-pur on her way to and from Calcutta. Anur is known for its shrine of the goddess Vishalakshi, on the way to which the Master while still a child passed into ecstasy. At Shyambazar he once joined a *kirtana*[1] party which sang the glory of the Lord continuously for seven days and nights. To the east of Jayrambati, on the other side of Amodar, is the big village of Tajpur; to the south is Jibta which houses the landlords of Jayrambati; to the south-west is Masinapur (or Masnepur); and to the west is Shihar. All these villages are within a mile of Jayrambati. West of Shihar is Shiromanipur which is inhabited by Mohammedans and which boasts of a police station.

Jayrambati, though not very far from Calcutta, is not easy of access, and roads were more difficult in the times we are writing of. In those days people trudged on through village roads and open fields, frequently infested with robbers. Only the rich few could afford the luxury of carts, palanquins, etc. One of these paths passed through Kamarpukur, Arambagh, and Tarakeshwar, the last place being noted for its Siva temple. Between Arambagh and Tarakeshwar lay a vast field called Telo-bhelo which was not safe even during daylight, so that people never crossed it alone or after nightfall. This was the shorter of the two routes usually followed by the people, the distance by it between Calcutta and Jayrambati being about sixty miles; and this was the path that the Holy Mother usually trod on her way to meet the Master at Dakshineshwar.

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1. A particular type of religious songs sung singly or in chorus, with musical instruments like cymbals and drums to keep time.

The other route through Burdwan, which is a railway station, was a much longer one and withal not free from robbers. People now proceeding to Jayrambati usually travel by a night train from Calcutta to Vishnupur where they can get buses which ply up to Jayrambati in the dry months and up to Kotulpur in the wet, with the rest of the way, a distance of about six miles, to be covered on foot or by a cart according to convenience. A modern all-weather road up to Jayrambati is now (1953) under construction which may ultimately be extended to Kamarpukur.[1]

Jayrambati, though thus shut out from modern civilization, does not lack in festivities. It has its rounds of annual celebrations. In autumn there is a three-day special worship of Simhavahini, the presiding deity of the village, which draws people from all parts. Besides, other days sacred to other gods and goddesses are duly observed with much eclat. On the Sivaratri day the villagers go to Shihar to offer worship at the temple of Shantinatha (Siva). There are also *kirtana* songs continued for twenty-four hours at a stretch and rural dramas on mythological subjects which are highly appreciated and largely patronized.

And above all, Jayrambati has been blessed by the advent of the Holy Mother, which has converted it into a place of pilgrimage where people from all over the world come to draw inspiration. The white dome of the temple, flying its metal pennant with the Bengali word ' ma ' (mother) engraved on it, announces the glory of the village to distant passers-by. The temple was consecrated on the 19th April, 1923 (Akshaya Tritiya, according to the Hindu calendar), which day is still observed and is made joyous by the presence of hundreds of devotees hailing from different places. The worship of the goddess Jagad-dhatri, which was initiated by the Holy Mother's mother and for which the Mother herself made permanent arrangements, is also

1. This has since been extended to Kamarpukur.

performed annually and is equally popular with the devotees. The establishment of the branches of the Ramakrishna Math and of its sister institution the Ramakrishna Mission, which cater to the spiritual, mental, and physical needs of the villagers, has also enhanced the popularity of Jayrambati, and easier accessibility is gradually converting it into a centre of attraction. It is a miracle that by the birth of the Holy Mother this insignificant hamlet should have leaped into such prominence within such a short time. The Mother herself placed on her head the dust of this hamlet and saluted it with the Sanskrit adage '*Janani janmabhumischa swargadapi gariyasi*' — mother and mother-country are superior to heaven itself.

3

THE ADVENT

We do not know when the Mukherjis came to Jayrambati. From two old documents it appears that sometime in the middle of 1669 a certain King of Vishnupur, named Sri Chaitanya Simha, gifted about six acres of land, free of all rents, to one Khelaram, a forefather of the Mukherjis, for the maintenance of his family and for carrying on the worship of Dharma. From this it appears that the Mukherjis had been worshippers of the deity even earlier and might have come to the village in that capacity. This was perhaps during the transitional period in the history of Bengal when Buddhism was being absorbed into Hinduism together with its deities of whom Dharma, under various names, was one. But once the Mukherjis had set their feet in the village, they became the family priests of the Hindus near about and thus gradually established the supremacy of Hinduism, owing to which Simhavahini, the Hindu deity, whom too the Mukherjis worshipped, became the presiding goddess.

The site occupied by the Holy Mother temple was perhaps the first place where the Mukherjis settled. This is borne out by the Siva image in black-stone which was found underground when the foundation for the temple was being dug. This must have once been worshipped by the Mukherjis. The Mother lived here till she was nine years old, and this was also the place which witnessed her marriage. 'My marriage was celebrated in the old house,' she recounted. 'We shifted to the new house (which later fell to her brother Varada's share) when I was nine years old—when the old house became too small.'

Ramachandra, a worthy descendant of the Mukherjis, whose tutelary deity was Rama, was respected at Jayrambati for his godliness, suavity of temper, and compassion for all. He married Shyamasundari Devi, daughter or Sri Haridas Mazumdar of Shihar. The wife, too, vied with

her husband in the practice of virtue. Her purity, simplicity, and fortitude were the talk of the village. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was born of this pious couple. The few sentences which occasionally dropped from the Mother's lips with regard to her parents go to show how virtuous they were and in what veneration she held them. 'My parents,' she said,' were very good. My father was a devout follower of Rama. He was very orthodox and would not accept any gift from people of other castes. How kind my mother was; how she would feed people, and how she took care of them! And how guileless she was!' And she added,' My father liked smoking. But as he smoked, he was so simple and humble that he would address in a friendly way any passer-by who crossed his door, and would say," Sit down, brother, and have a smoke." And then he himself would fill up pipe after pipe for him. 'Will the Lord be born where the parents are not self-composed?' About her mother she said,' My mother was Lakshmi (goddess of fortune) herself, so to say. Throughout the year she would gather all sorts of things and keep them in order. She would say, "My household is for God and His devotees...". This household was, as it were, a part and parcel of her being. What pains did she not take to keep it in order!'

Ramachandra had three younger brothers—Trailokyanath, Ishwarchandra and Nilmadhav—all of whom lived together. This family was never prosperous and somehow made both ends meet with the little that was earned by farming and priesthood; and yet Ramachandra was unstinting in his charity, of which we shall have some proof in due course.

Once when Shyamasundari Devi was living with her father in the northern part of Shihar, she had occasion to sit in the dark beside a potter's oven under a bel (*bilva, aegle marmelos*) tree. There suddenly issued a jingling sound from the direction of the oven, and a little girl came down from the branches of the tree. She laid her soft hands round Shyama-

sundari's neck, whereupon she fell down unconscious. She had no idea how long she lay there thus. Her relatives came there searching for her and carried her home. On regaining consciousness she felt as though the little girl had entered her womb.

Ramachandra was then in Calcutta in search of some means of earning money for his family. The thought of his family's poverty weighed heavily on his mind. One day, before he had decided to start for the city, he was engrossed in that thought. Then he fell asleep and dreamt that a little girl of golden complexion embraced him from behind by throwing her delicate arms round his neck. The incomparable beauty of the girl, as also her invaluable ornaments, at once marked her as out of the common run. Ramachandra was greatly surprised and asked,' Who are you, my child?' The girl replied in the softest and sweetest of voices, ' Here am I come to you.' Ramachandra woke up and the conviction grew in him that the girl was none other than Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, whose appearance implied that the time was auspicious for him to go out in quest of money. Accordingly he left for Calcutta. We do not know how far Ramachandra was successful in his quest. All that we know is that after returning home he heard what had happened to his wife, and, spiritually-minded as he himself was, he readily believed everything. Henceforth this holy Brahmin couple lived the purest of lives in expectation of the divine child. Ramachandra had the highest regard for his wife and never touched her person till the birth of the Holy Mother. Shyamasundari Devi was conscious of her unique fortune, and long after she said to Yogin-Ma,[1] ' How beautiful I looked when I was in the family way, how thick were my tresses, and how many pieces of cloth were presented to me during that time!'

Gradually the time of confinement approached. Autumn had now passed, and it was the beginning of the

1. A lady devotee of the Master, and later a constant companion of the Mother.

month of Paush when winter had just set in. This was one of the happiest times in Bengal villages. The harvest was over and the granaries were full. The fields around again began to smile with the shooting forth of the summer crop. The new harvest festival had just been finished, and the little children were counting the days for the festival of the month-ending[1] when they would have a feast of cakes. The Christian world was eargly waiting for the merry Christmas day. The Tantrikas were busy paying visits to the Kali temples, especially as such visits were thought to by very meritorious in that month. And it was the day of winter solstice when the longest night was over and the sun was beginning its northward course—the day on which the Hindu gods and goddesses wake up from their long slumber of six months. During such a time, a little after Thursday evening, on the 8th Paush (22nd December, 1853) when the night had spread her star-spangled cloth over the village of Jayrambati to lay it asleep after the day's labour the blowing of conchshells from Ramachandra's house announced the happy news of the advent of Sri Saradamani Devi. Soon an astrologer was called in and in accordance with the disposition of the stars and planets at the time, the child was ceremonially named Thakurmani. Her more popular name was, however, Saradamani.[2]

Sarada was the first child of her parents. She was followed by a sister named Kadambini and then by five brothers named Prasannakumar, Umeshchandra, Kalikumar, Varadaprasad and Abhaycharan. Kadambini died childless

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1. Paush Samkranti, roughly corresponding to the winter solstice.

2. It is customary to have two names, one for astrological and the other for common use. We have it on the authority of Swami Gaurishwarananda, who had it from the Mother herself, that Kshemankari was the actual common name she was given. But her mother's sister, who had lost a daughter called Sarada, requested Shyamasundari Devi to change her child's name to Sarada, so that the bereaved lady might imagine that the new child was none other than her own, though in another form.

soon after her marriage with Sudharam Chakravarty of Kokanda. Umesh, too, died before marriage at the age of eighteen or nineteen. Abhay died just after passing out of a medical school, leaving behind him a widow and a daughter, of whom we shall have much to say in future. The other brothers grew up and set up separate houses and reared their own families. Uncle[1] Kali built his house south of the ancestral home. Uncle Varada's house was to the north-west of uncle Kali's. South-west of this house was the Kalu-gede (Kalu's pond) mentioned earlier, which was used by the Mukherjis for cleaning the household utensils. South of the Holy Mother temple and north of uncle Kali's house was the house of uncle Prasanna. The Mother spent a long part of her life in the cottage of uncle Prasanna, which has since been purchased by the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math and added to the Holy Mother temple properties, in which also are included the Punya-pukur and the new house of the Mother. North of this cottage was the gateway of the house of uncle Surya who was the son of Ishwarchandra Mukherji, one of the uncles of the Holy Mother. Her eldest uncle Trailokya was a Sanskrit scholar; but he died in youth soon after his marriage. The youngest uncle, Nilmadhav, remained a bachelor and never parted from Ramchandra.

After the death of Rampriya Devi, his first wife, uncle Prasanna married Suvasini Devi. He had two daughters—Nalini and Sushila (or Maku) by his first wife; and by his second wife he had two daughters, Kamala and Vimala, born during the Mother's life, and a son, Ganapati, born after her demise. Uncle Kali had two sons, Bhudev and Radharaman, by his wife Subodhbala Devi. We have already said that uncle Abhay left behind him his widow Surabala and an only daughter Radharani, affectionately called Radhu or Radhi. Uncle Prasanna had a moderate

1. The devotees of the Holy Mother consider her brothers and brothers' wives as their own uncles and aunts. And so also her nieces are their cousins whom they call 'sisters'.

supplementary income from his priestly services in Calcutta. Owing perhaps to an early life of poverty, he was very frugal in his ways. With the money he saved, he purchased paddy fields and bullocks and thus improved his condition. Kalikumar was irritable by nature. It is said that before his birth his mother became very much overwhelmed by the loss of some children, when with the help of some medicines given by a woman who worshipped the goddess Kali and with her blessings too, she got Kalikumar as her son; and that accounted for the boy's irascibility. Kali stayed at Jayrambati, and as an orthodox Brahmin he attended to his daily worship and the observance of ceremonies, so that he was greatly respected. Uncle Varada generally stayed at Jayrambati, though he often went to assist Prasanna at Calcutta.

The Mother spent her early days in a poor family; but poverty was in a sense a boon and made life sweeter by providing greater opportunity for her to reveal her affection for all around. Ramchandra could not raise enough paddy from his lands to meet the expenses of the family; so he grew some cotton also. Shyamasundari Devi would carry the little girl Sarada to the cotton field where she would lay her down and go to pluck the cotton pods. When Sarada grew up to be a little girl she would help her mother in this work as also in spinning sacred thread with the cotton, which would fetch some cash for cloth and other family requirements. Sarada had also to look after her brothers. 'I used to go with them,' she said, 'to bathe in the Ganges, that is, in the Amodar, which was our Ganges[1]. After finishing our holy bath, I would eat with them some fried-rice there, and then bring them home. The Ganges had always an uncommon attraction for me.' As for other engagements, she said, 'As a girl I would plunge inot neck-deep water to cut grass for the cattle, and walk to the fields with fried-rice for the labourers. During

1. The popular belief, supported by scripture, is that all streams become as sacred as the Ganges at holy moments.

one year when locusts had nearly destroyed the crop, I went round the fields gathering paddy.' As regards her education she said, 'I sometimes accompanied Prasanna, Ramnath (a cousin), and others when they went to school in their boyhood; and thus I learnt a little.'

In addition to these brief and casual references to her childhood days, some information can be gathered from her contemporaries. Thus Sri Raj Mukherji's sister Aghormani Devi, a companion and playmate of the Mother's girlhood days, said, 'The Mother was very simple by nature; she was simplicity incarnate. Nobody had any altercation with her during childhood sports and games in which she very often played the master or the mistress of a house. She, of course, made dolls and played with them; but she preferred worshipping with flowers and bel leaves Kali and Lakshmi in images fashioned by herself. When other girls fell out, she would mediate, settle their quarrels, and re-establish cordial relations. Once during the worship of the goddess Jagad-dhatri, Sri Ramhriday Ghoshal of Halde-pukur was present. Finding the Mother lost in meditation before the deity, he kept his eyes fixed on her for a long time; but as he could not make out as to who was the deity and who the Mother, he left the place in fear.' Other old people would say, 'From her young days, Sarada was as diligent in her work as she was intelligent, quiet, and well-behaved. She had never to be asked to work. Of her own accord and with her own resourcefulness she would meticulously perform her duties.'

The self-identification of the Mother with Jagad-dhatri in her meditation which became pronounced enough to awe a casual observer was not an isolated event in this unique life. The girlhood days of the Holy Mother were made surprisingly singular by a strange combination of divinity and humanity, with a predominance of the former, as it were. Whatever others might think of her in her later life, she then generally revealed herself in her human role. But at the time of which we are writing, it seems as

though she stood at the meeting point of heaven and earth and could not decide as to which side she should lean, fresh as she was from the world above; or it might have been that it was ordained from above that those early days should be divinely encompassed. So it is that the Holy Mother said with reference to those days, 'Mind you, my dear, as a girl I saw that another girl of my age always accompanied me, helped me in my work, and frolicked with me; but she disappeared at the approach of other people. This continued till I was ten or eleven years old.'[1] When she went into the water to cut grass for the cattle, there would appear a girl of the same age to assist her in the work. No sooner the Mother return from the shore after depositing a sheaf cut by the new girl, than she would find another sheaf kept ready in the meantime.

We have now an idea of how busy the Mother was in her early life. From her reminiscences of those days we also gather that she had off and on to undertake such hard tasks as cooking. But though she was a precocious and painstaking little girl, her hands were not strong enough for the whole arduous process, and so she had to call in her father for taking down heavy utensils from the fire-place. She had to fetch pitchers of water from the tank for domestic purposes, and she took this opportunity to learn swimming with the help of the pitcher.

When she was eleven years old (1864), the country-side was ravaged by a terrible famine. Her father had garnered some paddy; and though he was by no means affluent, he was moved so much by the appalling misery around that he opened his granary and started a free canteen. The Hoy Mother described it thus: 'What a dire famine raged there once and how many starving people came to our house! We had stocked the previous year's produce. My father had the paddy husked into rice and got potfuls of *khichudi* (hotch-potch) cooked by mixing it with black len-

1. Much later, after the passing away of the Master, she had another vision of a similar girl (see the chapter on '*With The Devotees*').

tils. "Everybody in this house will eat this," he said, "and offer it to whoever may come. Only for my Sarada, a little rice of good variety will be cooked and she will eat it." On some days the number of people became so great that *khichudi* ran short. Cooking would restart at once. No sooner was the hot food served on the leaves, than I would fan it with both hands so that it might cool quickly. For, alas, the hungry stomachs could not brook delay! One day came a girl of either the (lowly) Bagdi or the Dome caste. The hair on her head had become shaggy for want of oil and her eyes were bloodshot like those of a lunatic. She ran to the tub where some rice-dust was soaked for the cattle and began gulping that. She wouldn't heed the people who were crying out, "Come in and eat the *khichudi*." Only after swallowing some rice-dust did she hear that call. Such, so dreadful, was the famine! After learning the bitter lesson of that year, people began to garner their paddy.'

From the vivid picture drawn up by the simple, unvarnished, and incomparable words of the Mother we find how busy she was seeking to cool by fanning with her soft, delicate hands the hot food for the starving people, she who in future would reign in the hearts of hundreds with the irresistible claim of a mother! And how full of affection for that tender darling of a child was the poor Brahmin! The Mother's life then was like that of any other girl in the village. But in the midst of this rural simplicity, now and then a sudden divine flash dazzles us. This interplay of light and shade could not perhaps entirely escape the notice of her brothers or of her parents who wanted to hug to themselves their small sister or smaller daughter as any other human being did. Perhaps because of the unforgettable impression of such moments of light, Shyamasundari Devi, mother of the Holy Mother, said in later life, 'My child, I wonder who you really may be, my dear! How can I recognize you, my daughter!' The daughter, of course, then brushed this compliment aside with apparent dislike,

saying, 'Who am I? Who can I be? Have I grown four hands (like any deity)? If so, why should I have come to you?' What Sarada Devi did as a sister becomes clear from a talk that she had one day with her mother. Shyamasundari Devi said, 'Sarada, may I have a daughter like you in my next life!' The daughter replied with a show of anger, 'You will drag me down again! To think that I should come again to bring up your children!' With the memory of the quiet diligence of her affectionate daughter still fresh in her mind, Shyamasundari Devi repeated with an obvious appeal, 'May I, indeed, get you again, my darling!' Uncle Kali, too, once reiterated this compliment when he said, 'Our sister is Lakshmi incarnate. She spared no pains to keep us alive. Husking paddy, spinning sacred thread, supplying the cattle with fodder, cooking,—in short, most of the household work was done single-handed by our sister.'

4

FORETASTE OF LIFE DIVINE

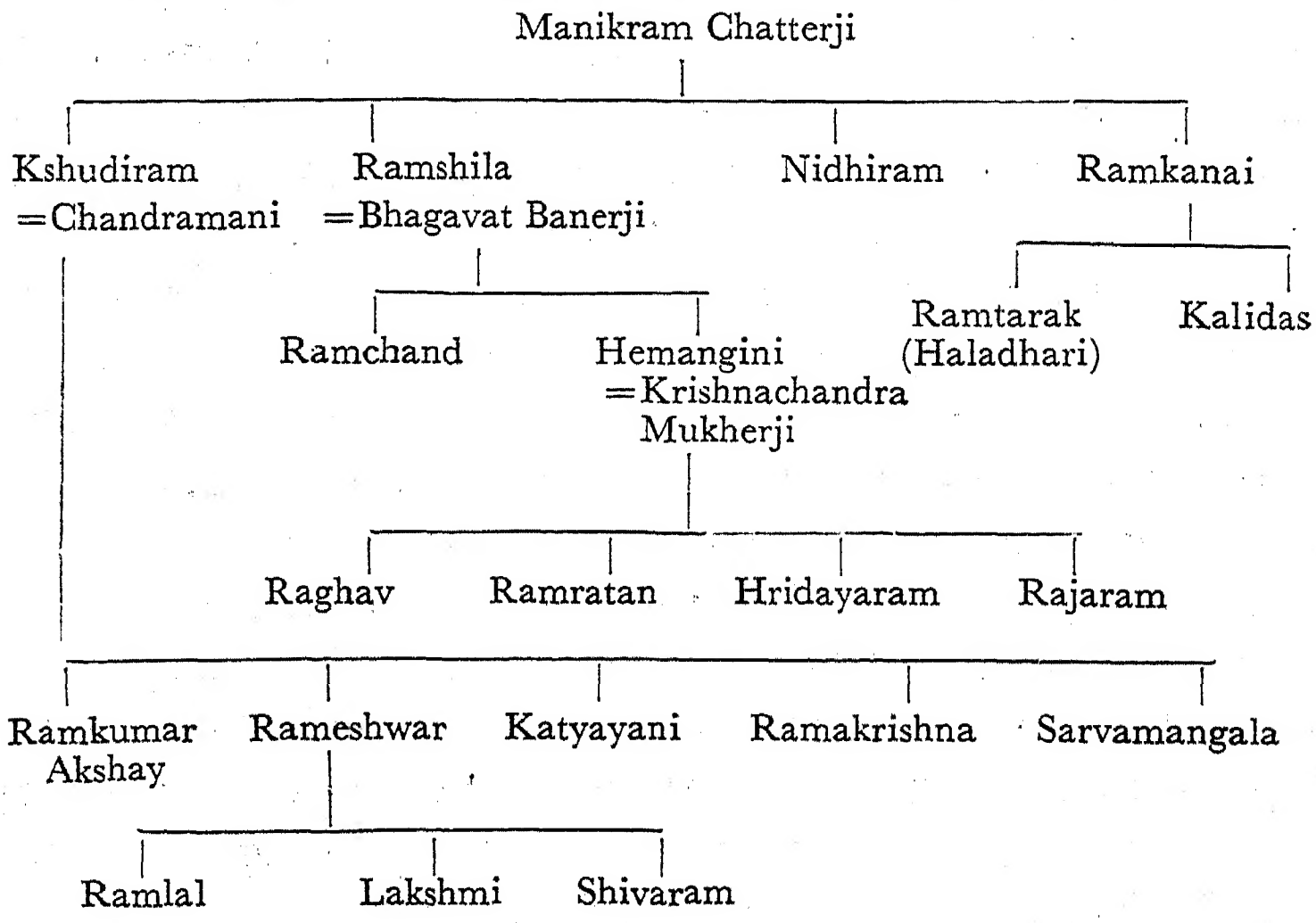
We have followed Saradamani Devi at Jayrambati up to her eleventh year. In the meantime an important event occurred to which we have now to revert.

Sri Ramakrishna's nephew Hridayaram Mukherji lived at Shihar, and the Master often went there. In the same village lived the maternal uncles of the Holy Mother. Besides, Shihar had the distinction of possessing a stone temple, built after old architectural patterns and dedicated to Siva under the name Shantinatha. The annual celebrations attracted the villagers from far and near who came to hear *kirtana* music or to witness open air country theatres called *yatra*. During one such *kirtana* at Hridaya's house a strange thing happened. Sarada Devi, then a mere child, sat in the lap of a woman who asked her in merriment, after the *kirtana*, 'Whom among the great number of people, assembled here, would you like to marry?' Sarada Devi at once lifted her two tiny hands and pointed to Sri Ramakrishna sitting not far away. At that time she had no idea of what matrimony was; but the unseen power that guided those little hands saw to the fulfilment of the wishes of that unerring heart.

The Mother had then completed her fifth year and entered the sixth; and there at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna, then completing his twentythird year, was caught in the maelstrom of a spiritual fervour preparatory to the formulation and articulation of his special message for the age. Ignorant people then thought that he had been swept off his moorings and had lost his head. When exaggerated stories of his strange behaviour reached his mother Chandramani Devi at Kamarpukur, the venerable old lady who had hardly got over the shock of losing her eldest son Ramkumar,[1] had Ramakrishna brought home and

1. The Chatterjis of Kamarpukur.

had witch-doctors engaged for curing him of his malady. But although medicines and medicine-men failed, Sri Ramakrishna became a little composed owing perhaps to the repeated spiritual visions that were vouchsafed to him at this time. Chandramani Devi was a little reassured thereby; but along with others she diagnosed the cause of the disease to be his apathy to worldly matters. And so with the help of her elder son Rameshwar, she set about searching for a bride for him; but their efforts were of no avail. At last Sri Ramakrishna came to know of this and, strangely enough, he evinced no rebellious distemper, but rather said with boyish acquiescence and gaiety, 'Go and find the bride marked out with a straw[1] in Ramchandra Mukherji's house at Jayrambati.' Following this meaningful hint the bride was soon found out, and the wedding day was fixed for a suitable date in early May, 1859. On the appointed day Rameshwar went with his brother to Jayrambati and the marriage was duly celebrated.



1. A figure of speech from the rural custom of marking out a fruit for gods, or a seed by tying a straw round its stem.

With regard to her marriage[1] the Holy Mother said, 'I was married when the dates ripen. When I went to Kamarpukur within ten days, I picked up dates there. Dharmadas Laha (the landlord of the village) came and said, "Is this the newly married girl?" Surya's father (her uncle Iswar Mukherji) carried me to Kamarpukur in his arms.'

On the evening after the day of marriage, the groom's party returned to Kamarpukur with the married couple. When they reached there, Chandramani Devi welcomed them home with due ceremonies. The marriage celebration ended with some minor domestic observances and feeding of relatives as a matter of form, on a small scale, for, the poor Chatterjis could not afford to have anything big. Hardly were these over when a sad thought began to oppress Chandra Devi. The Chatterjis paid three hundred rupees as bridal money; moreover, decency and honour demanded that the bride should be duly adorned, for which purpose Chandra Devi took on loan some ornaments from the Lahas, the village landlords. These had now to be returned; and yet Chandra Devi could not think of depriving the person of such a lovable and guileless child as Sarada. Sri Ramakrishna understood his mother's difficulty and assured her that during the little wife's sleep, he would imperceptibly remove the ornaments. This he did so deftly that Sarada Devi could not perceive anything. But next morning when she found her body unadorned, she said pointing to her various limbs, 'Where are the ornaments gone that were here and here?' Chandra Devi was moved to tears by these simple words of the child, and placing her on her lap consoled her saying, 'My darling, Gadai (meaning Ramakrishna) will give you better ornaments in future.'

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1. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (p. 554) relates, 'When women went round with twenty-seven burning sticks, the auspicious thread coloured with turmeric and tied round the Master's arm caught fire and was burnt away. The Master's acts were all inscrutable. Accepting his permanent Power (meaning the Holy Mother) he got his thread burnt by a trick, as it were.

The girl was consoled somewhat by this, but her uncle who came the next day became infuriated and carried her back to Jayrambati.

This time Sri Ramakrishna stayed at home for more than two years. Some two years after his marriage, he once went to his father-in-law's house. About this visit the Mother said, 'When I was seven years old, the Master came to Jayrambati. You know that a married couple go together for a second time to the groom's house. He told me then, "If anyone asks you when you were married, say that you were married at the age of five. Don't say seven."' The Master perhaps warned her thus, lest she should think of this second visit together to Kamarpukur as the marriage itself. The Mother also remembered that the Master's nephew Hridaya, too, came with him and the latter searched out his little aunt and worshipped her feet despite her shyness. Sarada Devi's thoughts were still immature; and yet, without being instructed by anybody, she washed the Master's feet and fanned him, which added to the mirth of the people around. From Jayrambati the Master went to Kamarpukur with Sarada; and not long after, he returned to Dakshineswar to dive headlong into the sea of austerities for the realization of God. Sarada, too, came to Jayrambati and resumed her life under the tender care of her mother in the midst of rural beauty and simplicity.

Her third and fourth visits to Kamarpukur were when she was thirteen and fourteen years old. The Master was then at Dakshineswar, where also lived Chandra Devi, his mother. At Kamarpukur the Mother found Rameshwar and his wife and other relatives. Some five or six months intervened between these two visits. During the second visit she stayed at Kamarpukur for a month and a half. After that she spent about three or four months at Jayrambati till in 1867 news reached there that the Master had come home with Hridaya and Bhairavi Brahmani (the lady who guided him in his Tantrika spiritual practices), so that

it became necessary for her to go there. The Mother went and lived there with the Master for seven months.

This long stay amidst the quiet natural beauty and healthy surroundings of Kamarpukur improved the shattered health of the Master, and he returned to Dakshineswar with fresh vigour and drowned himself again in spiritual striving. When calm prevailed again, he resumed his visits to his native village, spending the rainy season there every year up till 1880, in accordance with the advice of physicians who condemned that season at Dakshineswar as too bad for his delicate health, undermined as it had been by long and strenuous disciplines. It is no longer possible to ascertain how many times the Mother went to Kamarpukur or what happened there during this long period from 1867 to 1880. Moreover, it is impossible to determine the exact dates of the few incidents that were related of this period by the Mother and others. Hence we shall relate some of these without any attempt at chronological sequence, and then we shall return to the aneodotes of the Bhairavi Brahmani.

The devotees heard from the Mother of a supernatural incident that happened to her when she was at Kamarpukur at the age of thirteen. Just behind the Master's house was a village road to which a backdoor opened for the use of women. Farther away lay the big Haldar-pukur (the tank of the Haldars) to which they went for bathing and for fetching water. The way lay across the village road and near some houses. In those days women, particularly young women of high caste families, were not allowed to move about freely, so that for the Mother who was shy by nature, it was a problem to traverse this distance alone. Stepping out of the backdoor she mused, 'I am a newly married young woman; how can I go alone for my bath?' As she stood perplexed, she saw eight girls approach her. So she stepped on to the road. Four of those girls walked in front of her, and four behind. Thus they all went to the tank and had their dip; and then they

returned in the same manner. This happened during the whole time that the Mother was there. The thought often crossed her mind, 'Who are these girls who come every day at the time of bath?' But she could not make out anything, nor did she ever ask them who they were.[1]

We have already spoken of the Mother's keenness for study during the Jayrambati days, notwithstanding poverty and pressing duties. And we have to remember that in those days even well-to-do families did not think in terms of high academic attainments for their daughters. Sarada Devi's efforts thus bespeak of a wonderful enthusiasm for learning, which was kept up even in the more adverse circumstances while she was in her father-in-law's family. 'At Kamarpukur,' said the Holy Mother, 'Lakshmi[2] and myself used to read the first primer a little. Nephew Hridaya snatched away my book saying, "Women should not learn to read and write; will you ultimately turn to reading novels and dramas?" Lakshmi did not part with her book, for being a daughter of the family she clung to it with determination. I secured another copy secretly for one anna. Lakshmi learnt her lessons at the village school and then taught me.' In passing, we may refer to the Mother's reminiscence to show that this ardour lasted even into her youth. 'I got real education,' said she, 'at Dakshineswar. The Master was then at Shyampukur for treatment; and I was absolutely alone. A girl of the family of Bhava Mukherji came to bathe there. She stayed long and often with me. Every day as she came for bath, she imparted lessons and tested me at them.[3] I gave her plenty of greens,

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1. The Hindu belief is that the Mother of the Universe has eight maids on attendance.

2. The Mother was older by about ten years than Lakshmi Devi, her niece (daughter of Rameshwar Chatterji).

3. From an account in *Shri Shri Lakshmimani* it appears that at the Master's instance, a boy named Pitambar Bhandari, who was of eleven or twelve years of age, taught Lakshmi Devi and her aunt, the first and second primers, after which the lessons stopped, as that would be enough for enabling them to read the sacred epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In the recorded talks of the Mother we have no reference to this.

vegetables, etc., which came here to me from the (temple) garden.' As a result of this education the Mother could read such books as the *Ramayana* (Story of Rama), but she could not write much; and at the end of her life she could not even sign her name. In later days a disciple wanted to have an autograph from her, and she agreed to it in a way. But in a vain attempt to sign her name she scrawled and scrawled, and then, failing to produce anything readable, gave up the attempt.

In all references in her talks to the Kamarpukur family there was a genuine ring of love and respect for her mother-in-law and father-in-law. With regard to the latter she said with pride, 'The father-in-law, I had, was a spirited and orthodox Brahmin. He would not accept gifts indiscriminately. There was a standing order to refuse anything even though it might be brought to the house. As for my mother-in-law, however, if anybody brought anything to her secretly, she would accept it and then cook and offer it to Raghuvira (Ramachandra, the family deity), and distribute the *prasada* (sanctified food) to all. My father-in-law became very angry if he happened to learn of it. But he had a fiery devotion. Mother Shitala (another family deity) ever moved with him. He used to go out plucking flowers long before the day dawned. One day, as he entered the garden of the Lahas, a girl of nine said, "Father, come this side; the branch this side has plenty of flowers. Well, I shall hold it down and you shall pluck them." He inquired, "Who are you, my child, here at this time?" And she replied, "It is I, I of this Haldar house." It is just because he was of this nature that God (the Master) was born in his house.' Sarada Devi served her mother-in-law like a dutiful daughter, and during that service learnt many anecdotes of the Chatterji family, as also about its various ups and downs. Thus equipped, she contrasted one day the orthodoxy of her father-in-law, of which she came to know when rubbing oil on the back of her mother-in-law, with the liberality of the Master and

remarked with a smile, 'The Master was born in such a strict family, and yet he became the priest of a Kaivarta[1] (i.e. Rani Rasmani)!'

During the stay at Kamarpukur, the Mother made perfect what she had learnt earlier about swimming, singing, sewing, embroidery, and cooking. Village girls in those days did not get any training either in these and allied arts, or in cultural subjects in general. They picked up what they could by themselves, and the social set-up was eminently fitted for such self-education. There were the Bauls (a class of mendicants) and beggars who sang from door to door many songs of the highest religious import, and dramas on mythological subjects were frequently staged, through which rural people had their spiritual edification and temporal enlightenment. Many such factors contributed to the early education of the Mother. But the finishing touches came from the Master himself. Her talks with the disciples in later days bore the unmistakable imprint of such a simple but efficient training and the contact of a great personality during the most impressionable and formative period of her life.

When the Mother came to Kamarpukur, the Master began teaching her many things—both temporal and spiritual. He first conquered the heart of the girl through love and then poured into it all that he had learnt through long experience. On the one hand he held before her an integrated life made impeccable through the influence of the renunciation of all thoughts of enjoyment, and he trained her step by step in reaching that glorious pinnacle through a steady moulding of character and heightening of aspiration; and on the other hand he taught her how to perform the daily duties, to serve the deities, the Brahmins, and the guests, to be respectful to superiors, affectionate to the younger members of the family, and in everyway serviceable to the family as

1. Strictly speaking, Rasmani was not a Kaivarta, but belonged to the higher caste of Mahishya, though neither caste could ordinarily expect to have the aristocratic Chatterjis as its temple priests.

a whole. And by basing his instruction on the common sense view of adaptability according to time, place, and person, he taught her how to deal with others, whether within the family or outside it, how to be careful when getting into or out of a conveyance so that nothing might be left behind; and even such petty matters as trimming lamps, spicing curries, preparing betel rolls, were not left out of that comprehensive and wonderful curriculum. The feeling of elation that Sarada Devi, simple, pure, spiritually-minded and full of faith as she was, felt from those delightfully instructive contacts which were full of zest and yet free from all selfishness and passion, can be better understood from what she once told some woman devotees: "From that time onward, I always felt as if a pitcher of bliss was kept in my heart. I cannot convey any idea of how much and in what manner my mind feasted on that steady, unchanging divine joy.'

Lakshmi Devi once drew before a monk a picture in these words of how the ever-joyful Master taught the Mother: 'The Master always alluded to the unreality of the world and its troubles and tribulations, and told the Mother, "Detachment and devotion are the only things that matter." He said, "What would one gain by bearing children, like bitches and vixens?" The Holy Mother's mother had many children, some of whom had died. The Mother had brought them up in her lap and had witnessed her parents lamenting the death of some of them; she too had had her share of the sorrow. The Master drew attention to all these and said, "You too have had much first-hand experience, and you must have realized how painful it all is. Why all this fuss? Without all that, you are your own mistress and will ever remain so." The Mother was ever busy at work. One morning she was bedaubing the ground inside, with a paste of mud and cowdung,[1] and the

1. A practice common in villages where they do not have cemented floors and courtyards. Every morning the housewives mix earth and cowdung in water and then overlay the ground with the paste with the help of a handful of rags.

Master was cutting jokes while brushing his teeth with a twig. To the Mother he said, "You may dance and sing bedecking yourself with ornaments at the first rice-eating ceremony of your son but you will writhe in agony when the son dies." The Mother, had been listening to the talk in silence; but when the Master went on alluding repeatedly to the death of sons, she at last blurted out in a low tone, "Will all of them really die?" Hardly had the words escaped her mouth when the Master said loudly, "Ah me! Here indeed I have trampled on the tail of a deadly snake.[1] Dear me! I thought she was good-natured, and innocent of everything, but she seems to know a lot! How she says, 'Will all of them really die?'" The Mother left the place in a hurry.

Being free from the constrained manners and artificial courtesies of urban society, the Master felt a spontaneous ease at Kamarpukur and moved freely with people. One day the Mother wanted to go with another lady of the house to an open air religious drama (*yatra*) which was being staged in a neighbouring village. The Master did not like the idea; but then realizing that they were feeling disappointed, he enacted the whole drama before them without anybody else's help. He had seen it only once; but so sharp was his memory, so realistic his histrionics, and so sweet his music, that the ladies soon got over their sorrow and sat spell-bound for a long time, as though they were witnessing the real performance.

About the Master's disposition at Kamarpukur, the Holy Mother said, 'I never saw him morose. He rejoiced in everybody's company—be he a boy or an old man. Certainly, my dear, I never found him gloomy. Ah! At Kamarpukur he would say after leaving his bed every day, "I shall have this green today for my meal, please cook that." Overhearing him, we (i.e., Holy Mother and Lakshmi Devi's mother) would get together some greens and cook

1. A venomous snake reacts furiously when trampled on, whereas a non-venomous one tries rather to escape.

them. Sometime later he said, "Bah! what has happened to me? From early morning I think of eating only! Fie on this!" And to me he said, "I have no more desire for any particular dish, I shall eat whatever you cook and whatever you offer." He used to go to the country for recouping his health; for he suffered very much from digestive troubles at Dakshineswar and said, "Pooh! The stomach is a store of filth which keeps on flowing out!" All this made the body repugnant to him, and he took no further care of it.'

The Master was very fond of cutting jokes. One of his jokes is particularly enjoyable. 'Lakshmi's mother and I,' said the Mother, 'cooked at Kamarpukur. One day the Master and Hridaya sat for meal. Lakshmi's mother was a good cook. Tasting the dish that she had prepared, the Master said, "O Hridaya, it is the Vaidya Ramdas who has cooked this." And tasting the dish that I had cooked, he ejaculated, "And this has been cooked by Shrinath Sen." Lakshmi's mother was Ramdas Vaidya, and I Shrinath Sen—a quack. At this Hridaya added, "That is true; but your quack will be ever ready—even for massaging. She has only to be sent for. As for Ramdas Vaidya, his fees are high, you cannot have him at all times. Moreover, people call in the quack first,—he is ever at your service." The Master said, "It's true, it's true. She is ever there."'

The Master had a curious boyish liking for seasoning spices. One day, he ordered his niece Lakshmi Devi, 'Lakshmi, buy an anna worth of flavouring spices.' And to the Mother he said, 'Cook a soup of mixed lentils and season it with the spices in such a way that the sound will be like the grunting of a pig.'[1] Another day he heard Lakshmi Devi's mother directing the Holy Mother, saying

1. Cumin (jira), aniseed (mauri), fenugreek (methi), black cumin (Kala jira), and caraway (randhuni) are singed in oil or clarified butter (ghee), and then the cooked curry or soup is poured on the spices while the pan is still on fire, the reaction being a great sound which can be heard from afar.

that as the store was empty of seasoning spices, the cooking was to be done without them. Overhearing this the Master cried out, "How is that, my dear! If the spices have run short why don't you get a pice worth of them? It won't do to eliminate any ingredient from anything. It was for the smell of your seasoning spices that I left my delicious dishes at Dakshineswar and came here; and you now want to deprive me of this!" Put to shame, Lakshmi's mother at once ordered the spices.'

In 1867, after a long spiritual discipline Sri Ramakrishna came to Kamarpukur and the Holy Mother too came there. Though he had been formally initiated into Sannyasa, his teacher Totapuri had told him, 'That man is really established in Brahman whose self-abnegation, detachment, discrimination, and realization remain fully unaffected even in the presence of his wife. He is a true knower of Brahman who can ever look upon both men and women as the Self and deal with them accordingly. Those who are conscious of the difference between the sexes may be treading the path of realization, but are as yet far removed from the goal.' Totapuri, who was a seer himself, added that if a man of the highest realization like Sri Ramakrishna performed his duty towards his wife without any mental deflection, he lost no spiritual value thereby and incurred no demerit. So one can easily understand why a simple, truthful, and bold experimenter in the spiritual field like Sri Ramakrishna accepted his wife with all love when she came to Kamarpukur; and yet this intimacy never affected his mind in the least. But this affected the Bhairavi Brahmani very adversely.

Her first reaction to the Mother's coming was one of love. The Mother was very young then, and respected the Bhairavi as much as she did her mother-in-law, though fear had, perhaps, something to do in the matter. The Bhairavi who hailed from East Bengal, would use chillies abundantly in the curries, as was the habit in those parts, and she would offer these to Lakshmi Devi's mother and the Holy Mother

and await their reaction. The former would say bluntly, 'Forsooth! how terribly hot it is!' But the Mother, afraid of the Bhairavi's anger, would say, 'Good indeed!'—while tears trickled down from her eyes. Unmindful of these the Bhairavi would say to Lakshmi Devi's mother, 'But my daughter-in-law (Holy Mother) here says that it is very savoury. To you, my dear, nothing is good. I shall never again give you any curry.'—The Mother used often to relate the story with a hearty laugh. The Bhairavi one day decorated the Master like Sri Gauranga[1] with garlands and called in the Mother to see how charming he looked. The Mother, when she came, found him in a state of divine inebriation which frightened her a little, but when the Brahmani asked, 'How does he look?' she replied, 'Fine,' and left after a hurried prostration. Perhaps, she was both shy and nervous; for we have to remember that the Holy Mother was still a veiled maiden who could not yet afford to be bold in her relation with her husband in the presence of an elderly lady like the Bhairavi Brahmani; besides, the Mother who was naturally modest entirely lacked such frivolity.

Though the Mother had no lack of awe and reverence for the Bhairavi, the latter still became jealous because of the Master's free association with her. Quite a number of families there are which are made unhappy by this unnatural relation between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. Be that as it may, the Bhairavi, finding no occasion to have a fling at the Mother, gave vent to her jealousy in other ways. She became apprehensive of Sri Ramakrishna's future and warned him that by freely mixing with his wife he was but jeopardizing his spiritual welfare. A man of realization like Totapuri could see no harm in the free play of the blazing fire of Sri Ramakrishna's pure heart; but blinded by her love, the Bhairavi wanted to keep it under her fostering care, not knowing that she would

1. A 15th century Bengal saint, noted for his unique ecstatic love of God and venerated as an Incarnation.

herself get burnt in the process. She refused to realize that the scene was rapidly changing; the little Sarada was steadily but surely coming to the front to take her place as the inheritor of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual achievements and the propagator of the glory of motherhood in the world. Sri Ramakrishna, too, fully aware of her life's mission, was preparing her accordingly. Failing to grasp the divine plan behind it all, the Bhairavi ran counter to them, thereby heaping miseries on herself and making life intolerable for all. The truth, however, dawned on her at last, and finding herself in the wrong, she confessed this to Sri Ramakrishna, took leave of him, and went away to Banaras. She was henceforth totally blotted out of the Mother's life.

After the departure of the Bhairavi Brahmani, Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar and the Holy Mother after a long period of seven months of unalloyed joy, went back to her mother at Jayrambati (November, 1867). 'We can well understand that henceforward there came a change in her bearing, in her talk and general conduct, etc. But it is doubtful if this was noticed by the ordinary people, for this made her quiet rather than flaunty, introspective rather than obstreperous, and selflessly loving rather than self-centred; and through creating a feeling of unruffled contentment under all circumstances it made her sympathize with people in their trials and tribulations. It thus transformed her into a veritable embodiment of kindness' (*Lilaprasanga, Sadhaka-bhava.* pp. 343-44).

5

THE GREAT AWAKENING

Arrived at Jayrambati, the Mother found the village still the charming old place she had known it to be; the love and affection of parents, brothers, and cousins, and, in fact, of all relatives were as deep as ever; the daily life with its work and recreation, talks and discussions, still flowed on as before; yet in the depths of her heart could be felt the stirring of some muffled sorrow. At Kamarpukur she enjoyed a divine bliss, the memory of which remained for ever fresh in her mind; but finding nothing corresponding to it in the outside world, she turned inward with disappointment, converting life into a brooding, wailing dream. Autumn was followed by early winter, and then came chilly days. But for ever the Holy Mother kept her ears pricked up for any chance news trickling into this village despite the barriers of transmission and rural indifference. Thus passed four long years.

In the meantime some stray pieces of news broke into the quiet sublimity of Jayrambati and stimulated gossip. The villagers concluded from what they had heard that Sri Ramakrishna had lost his mental balance. The Mother had now neither zest in work nor solace in imagination; she only went about her daily round of duties mechanically. The ever-present pang of separation from the Master gnawed at her heart and cast a gloom over her face which drew the instinctive sympathy of the village women. But they, however, owing to their ignorance or narrow outlook, talked in a way that intensified rather than assuaged her agony. Their companionship became intolerable rather than welcome. Though they seemed to share her sorrow, they really pointed to her husband as an object of ridicule. And quite a few said pointing to her, 'That's the wife of a madman,' or under the guise of consoling her, inflicted on her a cruel wound by saying, 'Ah me! Shyama's daughter has been married to a

lunatic.' Loathing such company, the Mother avoided visiting any house and kept herself constantly engrossed in work. To a loving, faithful wife, any criticism of her husband is intolerable. She kept to her home all the time. And when this became oppressively monotonous, she would go to aunt Bhanu's[1] house and there on a verandah she would spread out her cloth and lie down.

The pure-hearted aunt Bhanu had an insight by which she got a glimpse of Sri Ramakrishna's hidden greatness. She said to Shyamasundari Devi, 'Well, sister-in-law, your son-in-law is Siva,—none other than Krishna Himself. I prophesy that in future you will believe what you don't now.' When the Master came to Jayrambati for the second time to take his girl-wife to Kamarpukur, aunt Bhanu reminded of the divine couple Siva and Parvati, sang merrily, 'As thou art beautiful, my little child (Sarada) hast thou got a groom who is both mad and naked.' We have to remember that in those days the Mother's complexion was bright and fair. Aunt Bhanu recognised even in those early days, and in her own way, the Master and the Mother as Siva and His consort. But people regarded her as too emotional in her nature, and nobody heeded her. Her house was the only place where the Mother got shelter and mental composure.

But obviously a whole life could not be spent thus. True it was that she did not believe in all the gossip that was going on about the Master. For, it was incredible that the Master could be mad,—he whose holy company had conferred on her immeasurable bliss only the other day, whose divine fervour infected her also to some extent and brought about an indescribable elation in her, whose

1. Aunt Bhanu or Bhanu-pisi was born at Shihar and married in a Ghosh (cowherd) family at Jayrambati. The Mukherjis were their priests at Jayrambati and the Mazumdars, of her father's family at Shihar. Pisi means father's sister, and though this non-Brahmin woman could have no family ties with the Mother, this relationship was established between them according to rural custom. The Master also called her Bhanu-pisi.

selfless thought for others had charmed her, and whose wise discourse and witty remarks held all spell-bound for hours. But, all the same, the ignorant village people could not evaluate his afflatus; and so their unbridled imagination raced apace, and their criticism was unchecked. The dutiful wife, therefore, came to think at last, 'When all people talk thus, let me once go and see him.' At the beginning of 1872, many people of the neighbourhood were going to Calcutta for bathing in the Ganges on an auspicious day[1] which was near at hand. The Mother wanted to accompany them, and yet through fear and bashfulness she could not speak out. At last no longer able to suppress her idea, she divulged it to a woman who communicated everything to Ramchandra. The old noble-hearted father took it in the best of spirits and said, 'Does she want to go? Very good.' And he himself escorted her.

Along with other pilgrims the father and the daughter had to travel about sixty miles on foot. On either side of the track there were open fields covered here and there with green crops and dotted now and then by villages shaded by clusters of trees. They came by big tanks with sparkling water, and now and again they took rest under huge shady trees. Some two or three days thus passed uneventfully. The Mother was full of enthusiasm for reaching Dakshineswar soon, but unfortunately her health was not equal to the task. That part of the country was infested with malaria from which she had often suffered.

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1. The *Lila-prasanga* takes this to be Dola-purnima which fell on 25th March, 1872. But it might have been the Chaitra-samkranti day which is widely observed as an occasion for holy bath. The Mother never spoke of Dola-purnima, but vaguely referred to 'some sacred day.' She also said, 'The Master worshipped me as Shodashi a month and a half after my arrival there.' If Dola-purnima is accepted as the auspicious day in question, the period intervening between the Mother's arrival and the Shodashi worship would be two and a half months instead of one and a half. The Mother was not likely to forget such an important event in her life. In this, as also in subsequent narratives, we take her version as the most authoritative.

Besdies, she was not used to making such long journeys. But, for fear of causing her father and others anxiety and inconvenience, she kept quiet about her growing indisposition for two or three days. At last, she had fever and the temperature rose so high that it was impossible for her to proceed. Ramchandra took shelter with her in a near-by hut. It can well be imagined how great was the Mother's disappointment. Fever was nothing new to her; so she had no worry on that score. Neither had this unknown place any terrors for her. But what caused her the greatest dismay was the delay interposed by all these events in meeting the Master for whom she had been pining away.

A divine vision came to her in this hour of dejection, and cheered her up. As the Mother lay unconscious on the bed, she saw a dark woman of peerless beauty sitting by her caressing the Mother's head and body with her soft, cool hands. It seemed to remove all her pain. The Mother asked, 'Where do you come from, my dear?' The stranger replied, 'I come from Dakshineswar.' The Mother wondered at this and said, 'From Dakshineswar! I thought I would go there, see him, and serve him. But as I am laid down with fever on the way, I fear this may never come to pass.' The dark woman said, 'Don't you worry! You will certainly go to Dakshineswar; you will recover soon and see him. It is for you that I have been holding him there.' The Mother said, 'Indeed! How are you related to us, my dear?' The woman said, 'I am your sister.' The Mother said, 'Indeed! That's why you have come!' After this conversation the Mother fell asleep.[1]

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1. On another occasion the Mother related the incident thus: 'Once, when on my way to Dakshineswar in my early years, I had fever. I lay unconscious, when I saw a dark-complexioned girl with dusty feet sitting by my bed-side and stroking my head. Seeing her feet full of dust I asked, "Dear child, did not anybody offer you water for washing your feet?" She replied, "No, mother, I shall leave forthwith. I came to see you. Don't be afraid, you will recover." And truly, I did recover gradually from the very next day.

Next morning she found that the fever was off, and that the divine vision had put fresh zeal and vigour into her. Hence when her father suggested that instead of waiting helplessly in that unknown place it were better to proceed slowly, the Mother readily agreed. Then they moved on. Fortunately, a palanquin was available near-by. She had fever on the way again, but it was not very severe. Besides, she was not then as helpless as before. So she kept quiet without adding to the worry of her father by telling him of her predicament. Slowly, the long journey ended, and by crossing the Ganges, they reached Dakshineswar at nine o'clock in the night.

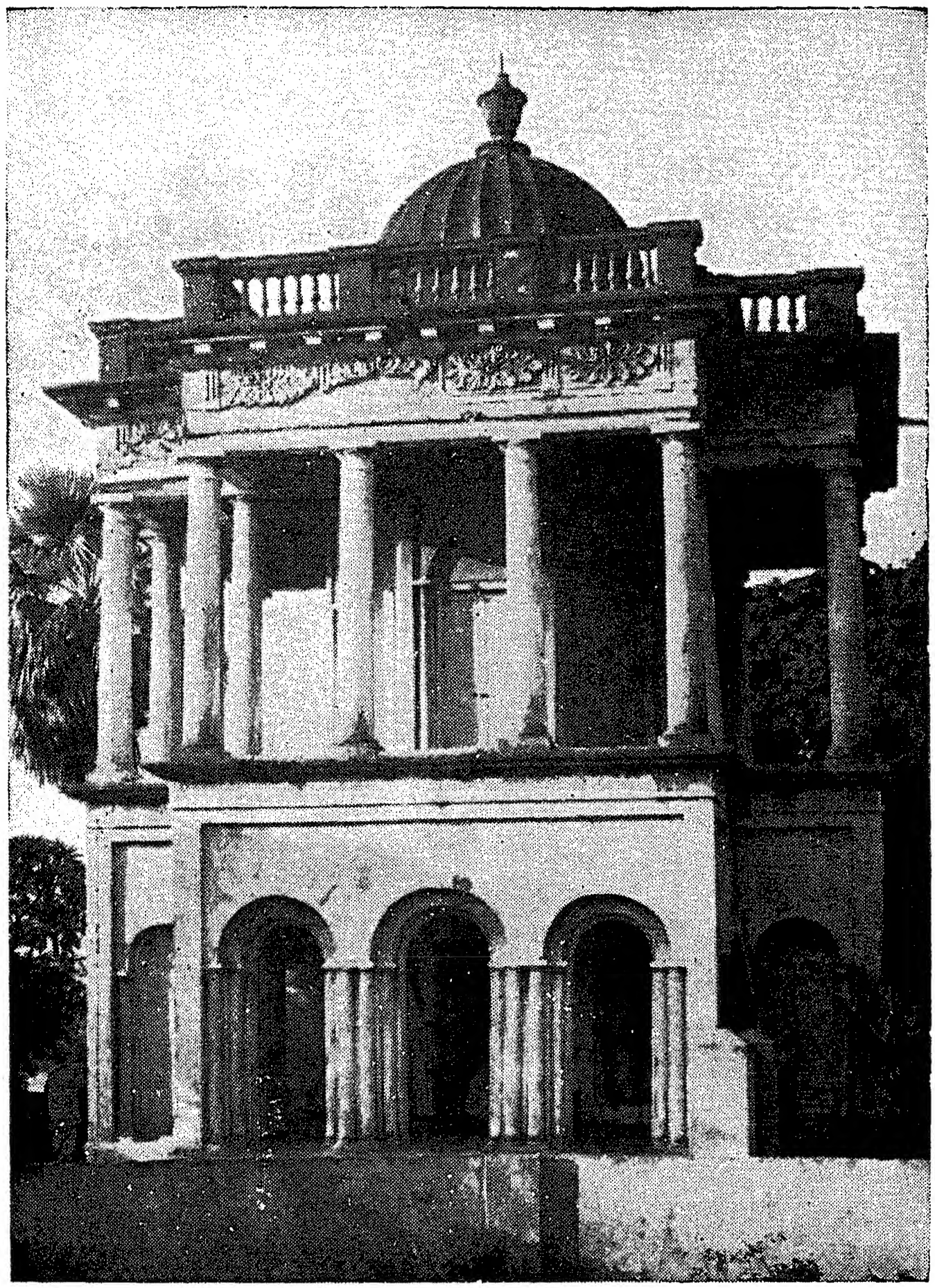
As the people from Jayrambati were landing from the boat, the Mother heard the Master saying, ' O Hride(Hridaya), I hope the time is not inauspicious. This is her first visit.' The Mother had no worry on that score as she knew that she had passed the inauspicious time in the boat itself. That apart, those few words of the Master had such a touch of sincere love in them that, moved by them, she went straight to his room, while others went to the Nahabat (i.e., the orchestra block or the concert house)[1] or other places. As soon as he saw her, the Master said, ' Ah! You are here at last! That's well done.' Then he ordered some one nearby, ' Spread a mat for her.' A mat was spread on the floor of the room. The Mother sat on it and talked with the Master. When the latter learnt that she was ill, he became very anxious about her treatment and comfort and said with extreme regret, ' Alas! You have come so late! Would that my Mathur were there now to serve you! My right arm is broken now, as it were.' Mathur who was the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, the

1. There are two detached two-storeyed structures on the Ganges on either side of the main temple compound. They were originally meant to be used for playing temple music at stated hours, particularly, early morning and evening. We are concerned only with the northern one, which does not seem to have been used for this purpose. The Master's mother Chandra Devi first used the upper storey as a dwelling room. Later the Holy Mother took up residence on the ground floor.

foundress of the Dakshineswar temple, and who was the first supplier of the Master's needs, had died only a few months before (16th July, 1871).

After the first greetings, the Mother wanted to go to the Nahabat. But the Master said, 'No, no, it will be difficult to arrange for treatment there; you stay here in this room.' So a separate bed was spread for her; and it was arranged that a woman companion of the Mother would also sleep with her. The temple staff had just then finished their meals, leaving no surplus. Hridaya, however, brought some fried-rice for the two. Next day, at the Master's instance, a physician was called in. Through proper care the Mother came round in three or four days, after which she went to live in the Nahabat, where her mother-in-law lived. When the old lady came to Dakshineswar, a room in the building where the proprietors of the temple lived was allotted to her. But a few months before the demise of Mathur, Akshay, a nephew of the Master, died in that room; and as Chandra Devi did not like to live there in the midst of old painful associations, she shifted on to the Nahabat, saying, 'I won't live there any longer. I shall stay in this Nahabat-room, and shall keep my eyes fixed on the Ganges. I have no need of that bungalow any more.'

Any suspicion that might still be lingering in the Mother's heart about the Master's mental aberration and apathy towards her, was set at nought by direct communication. What exaggerated tales had indeed been circulated among the ignorant villagers! There a god had been equated with a lunatic! And not only so, the gossips had been persistent and vigorous enough to impart even to such a faithful heart as the Mother's a slight touch of doubt! But now she saw that her god was just as he had been. Far from forgetting his wife, he seemed to be even more concerned about her. So it did not take her long to decide; she stayed on at the Nahabat serving both him and his mother out of the fullness of her heart. Her father also,



THE NAHABAT

THE UDBODHAN OFFICE

being reassured by the Master's love for his daughter and respect for himself, returned home cheerfully.

Taking his cue from the words of his guru Totapuri, the Master, while at Kamarpukur, had proceeded to test the strength and genuineness of his knowledge and to fulfil his duty towards his wife. After that his mind had been engaged for four years in visiting places of pilgrimage and undergoing austerity. Now, finding his wife again by his side through some divine dispensation, he resumed both the unfinished tasks. But in this he was not guided by the requirements of any commonplace conjugal relationship. He rather took his stand on the spiritual relationship subsisting between the teacher and his disciple or that between the Universal Mother and Her votary, and thereby he brought down to the world a new value by assimilating which humanity could move higher up. All this we write by way of introduction to the worship of the Mother in the form of goddess Shodashi. But before we actually come to that important event, we shall do well to understand more fully the mutual esteem which inspired the conjugal life of this unique couple.

During this time, the Master instructed his wife about everything ranging from such worldly affairs as domestic duties, dealing with relatives, good manners, and the need for adaptability under varying conditions, to spiritual practices like religious music, meditation, service, and self-abnegation. From her talks with him the Mother formed a clear conception of the aim and purpose of human life. For instance, the Master one day told her, 'Just as the moon is equally lovable to all, so also is God the nearest one to all. Everyone has an equal right to call on Him. If you invoke Him, you too will see Him.' And he did not stop with such instruction; he saw to its fulfilment in the everyday conduct of the Mother. The Mother spent the day at the Nahabat attending to her duties; but at night she had the Master's permission to share his bed with him. During one of these intimate moments, the Master, by way

of examining her, suddenly asked, 'Well, my dear, have you come to drag me down to the worldly level?' The Mother replied without a moment's hesitation, 'No. Why should I drag you to worldly ways? I have come to help you in your chosen path.' The Mother, too, while massaging his feet one night asked, 'How do you regard me?' The Master said in reply, 'The same Mother that is in the (Kali) temple, gave birth to this body and now resides at the Nahabat, and she, again, is now massaging my feet. Truly do I see you as a veritable form of the Blissful Mother!' The reader now can very well realize what supernormal characters we have undertaken to paint, and how hard the task is. If we are to follow these holy lives with an amount of understanding, transcending as they did all sensual relationships and carnal contacts, we on our part must for a while free our minds from worldly preconceptions and concentrate on eternal verities.

The Mother, for aught we know, slept every night with the Master. But this was no ordinary matrimonial love. The Master was then in the full vigour of his manhood and the Mother in the prime of her youth. The fiery ordeal that they now undertook, or rather the drama that they were now to enact for the edification of the world throws into the shade the hardest trial recorded in history. The Master, free from all sense of body-consciousness, spent the whole night in a state of divine afflatus. During one of the intervals between such moods of ecstasy he looked at the youthful, charming person of the Mother lying asleep by his side, and he engaged himself in a self-examination thus: 'O mind, this is what is called a female form. People think of this as a thing of supreme enjoyment and wistfully run after it. But if this is accepted, one becomes enmeshed in body-consciousness and cannot attain God who is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Don't be insincere to yourself: don't have a hidden hankering and yet make false profession. Tell me truly, do you want this or God? If you want this, then here it is before you; take

it.' With such self-inquiry no sooner did he stretch his hand to touch her body than his mind suddenly recoiled and got lost in the higher reaches of ecstasy; it never returned to the ordinary plane that night. Next day it was possible to bring his mind down only after repeating the Lord's name for a pretty long time.

The Mother slept with the Master continuously for eight months. During this long period not only did the Master's mind soar high, but the Mother's also was lost in thinking of eternal verities. So there was no occasion for physical hankering on either side. The Master was so deeply impressed by the immaculate purity of the Mother's character that in later days he bore witness to it in these words: 'If she had not been as pure as she really was, if she had lost self-control and seduced me, then who can say if I too might not have lost self-control and come down to the physical plane? After my marriage I prayed earnestly to the Mother (of the Universe), " Mother, do please totally eradicate all passion from my wife." Living with her at this time I realized that the Mother (of the Universe) had really responded to my importunity.'

Whatever the Master might have said by way of a lesson to others, we know for certain that there was no possibility of Sri Ramakrishna's succumbing to feminine fascination. For, had he not fully established himself in transcendental poise after being freed from earthly cravings? And what need could there be of any solicitude for the purity of the Holy Mother who was purity itself? But there is some meaning in all this when we look at it as a deliberate attempt at setting up a model; and then also the need for a public declaration of a secret truth becomes comprehensible. For only the husband and the wife know each other thoroughly; and so from the worldly point of view a certain intrinsic value attaches to the evidence of each for the other.

Although the mutual relationship of the Master and the Mother found expression in various ways, it reached its

acme in the Shodashi[1] worship. This is not the occasion for understanding the mystic import of this rite from the Master's angle of vision. Our endeavour will be to study its implication from the Mother's side.

The Master had accepted the little Sarada as his wife and given her a foretaste of divine love at Kamarpukur; and at Kamarpukur and Dakshineswar he had equipped her mind for domestic as well as divine life. Now was the time for awakening and making active the divine in the woman. Moreover, on the Master's part, there was need for raising her in the estimation of the world by offering his own sincerest worship, so that she might naturally take up the threads of his unfinished task after him; and it was necessary, too, to make that deity conscious of her real stature. That was the meaning of this worship.

After the Master had been assured of Sarada Devi's purity by living with her for a month and a half, he proceeded to offer her his heart's adoration. The new-moon night of 5th June, 1872, was the auspicious time for the worship of Kali in her aspect as Phalaharini (destroyer of the effects of past deeds). In Sri Ramakrishna's mind grew the desire of worshipping that night the Mother of the Universe as Shodashi.[2] The worship was not

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1. Shodashi is the Mother of the Universe in the form of a most beautiful woman in the prime of her youth, exquisitely attired, and seated on a throne. She is otherwise known as Tripura-sundari or Sri-vidya. In this instance the Master accepted the Holy Mother as a symbol for the deity, to start with, and ultimately established her identity with the deity. This worship of the Mother in human form is sanctioned by the scriptures, though the usual symbols are pictures, pitchers, earthen images, *yantras* (ritualistic drawings), etc.

2. The *Lila-prasanga*, *Sadhaka-bhava* (pp. 353-54) fixes the date for this ceremony as the 25th May, 1873 or more than a year after the Mother's arrival at Dakshineswar. The Mother herself put this as one month and a half (*vide* foot-note on p. 41); and in *Sri Ramakrishna Deva*, a biography of the Master by his direct disciple, Shashibhushan Ghosh, we read that the worship was performed 'within three months of Sri Sarada Devi's reaching Dakshineswar' (p. 331). The Mother also says that she returned to Jayrambati one year after the worship (*Sri Sri Mayer Katha*, II, 130).

to be performed in public, but secretly in the Master's room according to his own wishes. The Master usually relied on Hridaya for such odd jobs. But that night, Hridaya had to perform the special worship at the Kali temple; and he left for the temple after doing what little he could. Then Dinu,[1] the other priest, came to the Master's help after finishing his daily task at the Vishnu temple. All the accessories of the worship were now duly arranged; and there was in front of the Master an artistically decorated low wooden seat for the deity, though no image had been brought. At last when everything was in order, priest Dinu left the place at nine o'clock.

The Master had asked the Mother to be present at the worship; now she entered the room and looked on intently as the worship proceeded. The Master sat near the western door-way facing eastward. With the chanting of appropriate *mantras* he sanctified the accessories of the worship and after finishing the preliminaries, he beckoned the Mother to the decorated seat. The Mother had become semi-conscious through spiritual fervour as she had been watching the worship, and now not knowing what or why she was doing, she moved forward as though under a charm and sat on the allotted low stool facing the Master. The Master took some sanctified water from the pitcher and sprinkled it on her body. Then, after uttering the *mantras* appropriate to the occasion, he prayed to her, 'O Thou eternal Virgin, Thou Mother Tripura-sundari, the Source of all power, do Thou open the gates of perfection. Sanctifying her mind and body, do Thou manifest Thyself through her (the Holy Mother) and ordain all good.' Then he mentally identified the different limbs of the Holy Mother with the corresponding parts of the Deity with appropriate sacred formulae (*mantras*), and considering her as none other than the Deity Herself, worshipped her duly with the usual sixteen kinds of

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1. He belonged to Mukundapur and was the son of a cousin of the Master.

offering. At last the votary took up some sweets in hand and put them in the mouth of the Deity. By and by, the Mother lost all outer consciousness and the worshipper, too, as he proceeded with his ceremonies, gradually lost himself in beatitude. On that level of ecstasy the Deity and the devotee became identified. In this way hours passed; and when midnight was long over, there were signs of the Master's recovery from his absorption. As soon as he regained sufficient consciousness, he offered himself to the Deity; and then laying himself, the fruits of all his disciplines, and his rosary at the feet of the Goddess, he uttered the salutation: 'O Thou, the most auspicious goodness among all auspicious things, the fulfiller of all aims, the refuge of all, Thou the three-eyed, golden hued consort of Siva, Thou the power of Narayana, I salute thee.' The worship was over; and this adoration in a human figure of the Divine Mother who is the source of all enlightenment, ended the long course of austerity that the Master had undertaken. And for the Holy Mother too, was opened the door leading to the highest achievement that humanity conjoined with divinity can attain. After the worship she returned to the normal plane and saluting the Master left for the Nahabat.

The Mother had then completed the eighteenth year of her age and entered the nineteenth, though by mistake she often said, 'I had then commenced my sixteenth year.' We now put in brief the other details of this incident that the curious women devotees gathered from the Mother. When the Mother said that at the commencement of the ceremony, the Master painted her feet with liquid lac-dye, put vermilion on her forehead, clad her with a new piece of cloth, and put betel and sweets into her mouth, Lakshmi Devi asked with an amused smile, 'You are so shy, my dear, how did he put clothes on you?' The Mother simply replied, 'I was not quite myself then.' The Mother sat facing the jar of Ganges water which used to be kept at the north-west corner of the room and to her

right were the materials for the worship. A night-long festivity was going on outside, and nobody knew what was happening within the closed room, nor did noise from outside reach them. There were only two persons sitting facing each other—the Master and the Mother. Towards the end Hridaya came in. After the adoration, the Mother was faced with a problem,—what was she to do with the conch bangles, cloth, etc., which she had received as offerings. She referred the matter to the Master, who after a little reflection said, 'Well, you can give them to your mother; but mind you, when making them over, do not think of her as a mortal, but rather as the Universal Mother.' The Holy Mother did accordingly.

In a state of divine afflatus the Mother accepted the worship as also the result of all the spiritual disciplines of the Master. In fact, she inherited the richest spiritual wealth without any corresponding conscious endeavour on her part; and in addition, she learnt how to look upon all beings as manifestations of the Universal Mother. The Master, too, felt himself quite at ease after discharging the highest duty to his partner in life.

The Mother continued to share the Master's room for about six months more even after this ceremony. This was not for her, however, an unmixed boon; for not being fully familiar with the divine moods of this unique personality who constantly got lost in trances and raptures, she off and on spent sleepless nights sitting by him and anxiously watching the startling, unfamiliar, physical changes. 'Words can't describe,' she said, 'the spiritual states in which the Master remained merged. Often in his divine ecstasy he would be talking of many things; sometimes he would laugh and sometimes weep, and sometimes he would be totally lost in trances. This went on for the whole night. How deep a fervour it was and what an absorption! My whole body trembled at the sight, and I waited eagerly for day-break. I did not then understand much of divine afflatus and ecstasies. One night, seeing his

samadhi continuing interminably, I began weeping in fear and called in Hridaya with the help of Kali's mother (the maidservant). He went on repeating the Lord's name in his ears, till after quite a long time he returned to the conscious plane. Learning next day that I suffered from this kind of fear, the Master himself taught me, "If you notice such a kind of mood in me, then utter such a name; and if such another, then this other *Bija* (mystic syllable)." After this I was not so afraid; he regained consciousness when those names were uttered. Quite a long time passed in this way and then as he came to know one day afterwards, that in apprehension of his moods I sat up for the whole night and could not sleep, he asked me to sleep apart at the Nahabat.'

But wherever she might be, whether in the Master's room or at the Nahabat, she considered the service of the Master and his mother to be the one duty of her life. The old lady was then too feeble to move about freely, and so she depended much on the Holy Mother, who was well aware of this. Hence, whenever the old lady called her, she rushed to her side. If any one warned her that by such heedless dashing she ran the risk of striking her head against the low door-frame, she would reply, 'What if I do? She is my superior and my mother. Alas, she is old! If I don't hurry up, it may inconvenience her and so I run.' The old lady then lived upstairs and the Holy Mother on the ground floor of the Nahabat.

Equally whole-hearted was her service of the Master. The companionship that she had through this medium of service, she considered to be a fortune for herself. The communion through service was not confined to the physical plane alone. Whenever the Master came down to the conscious plane during this period, he was swayed by a feeling of womanliness within himself, so much so that he considered himself, as also the Holy Mother and others, as the maids or handmaids of the Universal Mother. The Mother then clothed and adorned him like a woman and felt

elated at the thought that just like the Master, she too was a maid of Kali. Again, she asserted no independence and showed no self-will in this act of service; she felt satisfied by doing the little the Master wanted and that in the manner he favoured.

A year after the Shodashi worship, the Mother fell ill. Shri Shambhunath Mallick had then succeeded Mathur Babu as the supplier of needs (*rasad-dar*, as the Master put it) for the Master. He called Prasad Babu, a physician, to treat her, but there was no relief. Realizing that then at Dakshineswar, she could be of no use to others and that on the contrary she would be adding to their anxiety, she left for Jayrambati.

6

IN A MOOD OF SELF-SURRENDER

About a year after the Shodashi worship, the Holy Mother returned to Jayrambati (about June, 1873) and visited Dakshineswar for the second time in May, next year. In the meanwhile Kamarpukur and Jayrambati were subjected to two grievous losses. In the second week of December, 1873, the Master's elder brother Rameshwar passed away. Next year, on the holy Rama-navami day (26th April), the Holy Mother's father Ramchandra Mukherji who was a staunch devotee of Sri Rama, breathed his last. That was a stunning blow to the Mukherji family. The incident was all the more poignant because it happened just on the fourth day after uncle Kalikumar had been invested with the sacred thread. To the Holy Mother, who was the first child of her father and had had his affection in abundance, the grief was unendurable; and soon after, she left for Dakshineswar perhaps to free herself from that poignant grief.

The extreme indigence of the Mukherjis might have had something to do with hastening this departure. The bereaved family had no money on hand; the boys were all very young; priestly service, which was a source of supplementary income, had become closed for the time being. Farming suffered because of lack of proper supervision. Though Ishwarchandra, Ramchandra's brother, earned something through priesthood in Calcutta, he had not much to send home after meeting his personal expenses. Finding herself in such straitened circumstances, Shyamasundari Devi became despondent and in utter helplessness proceeded to maintain the family with physical labour. The Banerjis of the village were better off at that time. Shyamasundari husked their paddy in her own house in return for one fourth of the rice produced. In giving some idea of her toil, she told Indumati Devi, one of her daughters-in-law, 'Leaving the rice boiling on the fire, I went to Shihar to get vegetables.

I cooked simultaneously on sixteen ovens put in a row, all for a potful of boiled rice and a basketful of uncooked rice.' Even then she could not earn enough for feeding the family and educating the boys. Accordingly, the boys took shelter in the houses of relatives in neighbouring villages. Prasanna went to Jibta, Varada got shelter in the house of Hareram Bhattacharya at Shihar, and Abhay went to his maternal uncle's[1] in the same village. The Holy Mother, perhaps for the same reason, went to Dakshineswar, where she took shelter in the Nahabat along with her mother-in-law.

Dakshineswar of those days was an unhealthy place, where dysentery prevailed during the wet season. The Mother suffered from it soon after her going there. Shambhu Babu arranged for her treatment, but she did not recover quickly. Nevertheless, the Holy Mother did not leave the place, for that would deprive her of the opportunity of serving the Master and his mother. She continued there for a full year although still ill.[2] At last when she was a little better, she left for Jayrambati (probably in September-October, 1875). But the dysentery returned a short while after, and it took such a serious turn that she became bed-ridden, nay, her life itself was in danger. When the Master got news of her sad condition, he said sorrowfully to Hridaya, 'What is it all coming to, O Hride! Is she destined only to come and go, and not do anything worthy of a human birth?'

During the period of relapse the Mother had to go out again and again and her body was very weak and emaciated. She laid herself down on the bank of the pond, Kalugede. Once when she saw in the water of the pond the reflection of her body reduced to skin and bone, she thought: 'Bah! Fie on it! This indeed is the body! Why fuss about it? Let it lie down here, let me leave it!' In later days she said, 'I was ill then; the whole body was swollen

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1. They had five uncles Rambrahma, Ramtarak, Kedar, Shripati, and Vaikuntha and one aunt, Dinamayi. The family is now extinct.

2. 'I had returned to the country after suffering for a year at Dakshineswar' (*Sri Sri Mayer Katha*, II, 131).

and liquid matter flowed down from the nose and ears. Umesh (a brother) said, "Sister, there is Simhavahini here; will you make a vow of fasting before her?" It was he who made me agree and led me by the hand there. To me, then, a full-moon night was as dark as a newmoon one—I had lost sight through continuous tears. Going there I lay down on the basement of the shrine. To crown all, I had the dysentery; three or four times I had to crawl on all fours to go out. There was a woman whom I called 'god-mother'; her house was near at hand. She cleared her throat off and on, so that I might not get frightened. A little while later, She (the Deity) appeared to my mother in the form of a blacksmith girl of the age of Radhu (twelve or thirteen years) and said, "Go quick, hasten; raise her up and bring her. Give her this medicine; this indeed will relieve her." Besides, She said to me, "Apply to the eyes drops of juice of the gourd flower made into a paste with salt; that will relieve you." Then I took the medicine that mother had received, and applied to the eyes drops of juice of the gourd flower. As soon as I did so, all the foul matter fell off from the eyes. The eyes were cured that very day, and the swellings in the body subsided. I felt greatly relieved. I recovered. To every enquirer I said, "Mother (Simhavahini) gave the medicine." From that time on the Mother's fame spread around. I got the medicine, and the world also was blessed. Formerly nobody knew the Mother so much. My uncle made a vow of fasting before the Mother. But She let loose so many big ants that he was not allowed to stay. She appeared to my mother in a dream and said, "I am now in sleep;[1] why has he taken the vow of fasting now? He is a Brahmin; does he not know all this? Go quick, hasten; raise him and bring him." My mother said, "You have said so many things. Why shouldn't you have revealed the medicine also?"'

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1. The gods and goddesses sleep for six months following the summer solstice, and keep awake for six months after the winter solstice.

When life was despaired of, the Mother came round miraculously by taking refuge in the goddess. Humanity has here a demonstration of the infallibility of divine intervention, though it is not possible for all to rely absolutely on it; only those like the Holy Mother, whose hearts are full of devotion, succeed in this. But if the deity can once be made propitious through the supplication of such rare souls, weaker persons can share in the good fortune. The Holy Mother had a lifelong and incomparable devotion to Simhavahini. With full faith she took some earth from the basement of the shrine, kept it in a case, put some of this in her mouth now and then, asked her niece Radhu to do so, and related the legends of Her greatness to others. Encouraged by the Mother's success, others too offered vows to the Deity and got their wishes fulfilled thereby. This, as also the efficacy of that earth in curing diseases, spread the fame of Simhavahini all around, drawing even to this day numbers of pilgrims to Her shrine.

Chandramani Devi, the blessed mother of Shri Ramakrishna, passed away at the age of eighty-five on the 27th February, 1875, the birth-day of the Master. As the last moment drew near, the old lady was taken to the Ganges, and the Master offered flowers, sandal paste, and *tulasi* (holy basil) leaves at her feet.

The Holy Mother, was then at Jayrambati. She seemed to have fallen on evil days; because, hardly had she recovered from dysentery and family bereavement, when she had an attack of malaria with enlargement of the spleen. For treatment of the spleen trouble, she had to go to Kayapat-Badanganj where it was singed. This was a queer remedy of a bygone age. Its curative effect was disputable, but the suffering of the patient was indescribable. After ablution, the patient was made to lie on the ground and held down by some strong persons, so that he might not escape. Then the medicine-man would take in hand a burning piece of jujube wood and rub it on a plantain leaf laid over the region of the spleen. The skin

would get burnt and the patient would shriek and scream. It is said that the Master, too, had his spleen treated thus at the market-place of Kayapat-Badanganj. When Shyamasundari Devi went to the local Shiva temple with her daughter, some other people were undergoing the treatment; and the Holy Mother saw their plight and heard their screams. When her turn came, she stepped forward to the place after bath, and some persons advanced to hold her fast. But she said, 'Nobody need hold me; I myself shall lie down quietly.' And in fact she went through that ordeal in silence. The spleen shrank up for some reason and she regained her health.

It is an admitted fact that when God or any of His Powers incarnates, the avatar does not forthwith begin a frontal fight with adverse forces in the shape of existing institutions, but rather diverts them to new channels of usefulness, reorientates them, divests them of their malignant incrustations, or manifests his glory despite them. By thus demonstrating the force of spiritual ideals before erring humanity, the avatar encourages men to make fresh attempts for progress. We do not know what motives prompted such actions of the Mother; but she herself declared, 'I have done much more than is necessary for setting an ideal.' From such a standpoint of setting an ideal should we understand some of these anecdotes in the Mother's life, which otherwise seem to us—moderns, as irrational.

Religious writers agree that God becomes merciful through our devotion. We had a verification of this in the awakening of Simhavahini. Religious people are also agreed that any act or process that is taken recourse to by a holy man for the fulfilment of his objective, acquires such an extraordinary potency, that through it is achieved some result which could not otherwise have been predicted. In the contraction of the spleen we had a demonstration of this. The scriptures also declare that if the devotee is really earnest, God becomes gracious and abides for ever in

his house. This will be proved by the worship of the goddess Jagad-dhatri in Shyamasundari Devi's house at Jayrambati, to which event we shall now turn.

But before we actually do so, we shall have a peep back at the natural disposition of the Holy Mother. It is astonishing to think that an uneducated village girl like the Mother should not have lost her head or been puffed up with pride either at the sight of her husband being adored as an incarnation by the rich and cultured society of Calcutta, or by herself being worshipped by that most revered saint, who was the doyen of all spiritual giants in that city. On the contrary, she became all the more considerate towards her old acquaintances and more devoted to her village gods and goddesses. Her husband was not resourceless at the time but even so she did not worry or embarrass him by asking for monetary help even in the worst days of her privation. She preferred to endure her lot amidst the poverty of her paternal home; only at times did she lift her heart in prayer to God. It was no wonder, then, that where there was a combination of this absolute surrender on the part of the daughter with the unquestioning devotion of the simple-hearted mother Shyamasundari Devi, the worship of the powerful goddess Jagad-dhatri was possible in a poor mud-house.

Once, at the time of the Kali worship, Nava Mukherji, as a result of some village feud, did not accept the gifts of rice and other things from Shyamasundari Devi, which were her contribution to the joint endeavour at worship. She had gathered together these things with the greatest effort and the utmost sincerity; but another man's cruelty now deprived her of the chance of offering them to the Deity. Her sorrow was so painful that she spent a sleepless night and went on repeating, 'This rice I prepared for Kali, and this has not been accepted! Who will now eat this? Indeed, it is Kali's rice, and nobody else can eat it!' Then a Deity appeared to her in a dream and awakened her by patting her body. Opening her eyes, Shyamasundari Devi saw the

Deity, red in hue, sitting near the door with one leg placed over the other, who said, 'Why do you weep? I shall eat Kali's rice. Why do you worry?' Shyamasundari inquired, 'Who are you?' The Deity replied, 'I am the Mother of the Universe: I shall accept your worship as Jagad-dhatri.'

Next morning, Shyamasundari Devi said to the Holy Mother, 'Dear Sarada, who is that Deity with red hue, resting one leg on the other?' The Mother said, 'She is Jagad-dhatri, to be sure.' Grandmother then said, 'I shall worship Jagad-dhatri.' She went on talking about that worship off and on. She secured from the Vishwas family about 400 lbs. of paddy. It was then raining incessantly. Grandmother said, 'Mother, how shall I worship you? I can't so much as dry the paddy.' But through the grace of the Goddess it so happened, that though it rained all around, grandmother's mat, on which the paddy was spread, had plenty of sunshine; and she got it husked and converted into rice. The clay image of the Deity had to be painted after drying it under fire. Uncle Prasanna went to Dakshineswar to invite Sri Ramakrishna for the celebration. But he said, 'Mother will come, aye! Mother will come! That's excellent. But weren't you in very straitened circumstances, my dear?' Uncle replied, 'You have to come, I have come to take you.' The Master said, 'I am as good as already there. It's fine. Go, and have the worship. It's fine indeed! It will do you good.' The worship was duly performed. Many people from far and near were invited and heartily fed. The rice was enough for all. At the time of the immersion of the image grandmother whispered in the ears of the Goddess, 'My dear, Jagai, do come again next year. I shall be making arrangements for you all the year round.'

Next year, grandmother said to the Holy Mother, 'Look here, dear, you too should contribute something; my Jagai (Jagad-dhatri) will be worshipped.' The Mother remonstrated, 'I can't bear all that trouble. It's enough that you had the worship once; why rake up troubles again? There's no need; I can't do it.' Then she saw

three figures in a dream at night—Jagad-dhatri, with her maids Jaya and Vijaya—who said, 'Well, shall we go then?' 'Who may you be?' the Mother queried in surprise. 'I am Jagad-dhatri,' said the Deity. At this the Mother said with great consternation, 'No, where will you go? No, no, where will you go? Do stay on, I didn't ask you to go.' Thenceforth the worship continued uninterruptedly for some years. The Mukherji family had not then enough hands to help in the festival. So the Holy Mother had to be present every year for scouring the utensils and doing some other odd jobs.

As the day of immersion of the image on the first occasion happened to be a Thursday sacred to the goddess of fortune, the Holy Mother objected to bidding farewell to Jagad-dhatri on that day. The next day was the last day of the month, and the next the first day of another month. Hence the immersion took place on the fourth day.

The worship in the first four years was performed in the name of Shyamasundari Devi, in the second four, in the name of the Holy Mother, and in the next four in the name of her uncle Nilmadhav. The Holy Mother felt no need for continuing the worship after twelve years, because all had had their names formally proposed as worshippers. That very night after she had made the declaration, the Deity appeared to her in a dream and intimated that the family of Madhu Mukherji's aunt had it in mind to worship Her, and asked her three times, 'Shall I go then?' The Holy Mother realized that Jagad-dhatri wanted to leave her after getting her affirmation; and so she took hold of the feet of the Deity and said eagerly, 'I won't let you go any more, I shall worship you every year.' With this determination in mind, she later on secured about three and a half acres of paddy land with which she made a trust for the continuance of the worship.[1] With the income from this land and some contributions from devotees, the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur, perform the worship every

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1. The deed of trust was registered at Koalpara on 7-7-1916.

year with due pomp, at the Mother's temple at Jayrambati. And as in the first year, so now too, the worship continues for three successive days—on the first day with all ceremonials but on succeeding days not so elaborately as was the custom during Mother's lifetime. One on each side of the main Deity Jagad-dhatri, are placed images of Jaya and Vijaya. The devotees of the Holy Mother believe that as the Mother was none other than Jagad-dhatri Herself, when the latter is worshipped the Holy Mother too is adored as a matter of course.

7

IN LIGHT AND SHADE

The Mother continued to live at Jayrambati for some time after recovering from malaria and spleen trouble. Perhaps, she returned to Dakshineswar in the winter of 1877 following the first Jagad-dhatri worship. We noted earlier that Providence had led Shambhu Babu to step into the shoes of Mathur Babu as the supplier of the Master's needs, and that he had been serving the Master and the Mother with whole-hearted devotion. His wife, too, adored the Master as God himself; and whenever the Holy Mother happened to be at Dakshineswar, the lady took her to her house every Tuesday to make offerings at her holy feet as she would have made at a deity's. It did not take long for a warm and generous-hearted man like Shambhu Babu to realize that for the Holy Mother who was used to the ease and freedom of the village, living in a small place like the Nahabat, which was nothing better than a cage, would be very uncomfortable. So he purchased for Rs. 250/- a small plot of rent-free land near the temple premises, on which he planned to build a thatched house for her. Coming to learn of this, Captain Vishwanath Upadhyaya, who was a staunch devotee of the Master and was in charge of the timber yard of the Nepal Government at Belur, across the river, offered to supply free of cost, the *sal* wood necessary for the purpose. And so three *sal* logs were sent with the flow-tide to Dakshineswar. But at night another high tide carried away one of the logs. Hridaya read a bad omen in this and castigated his aunt saying, 'You are ill-starred.' He made also some other uncharitable remarks. But Captain Upadhyaya, unmindful of the loss, sent another log. The house was thus completed, and the Mother took her residence there[1] with a maid-servant, engaged to keep her

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1. For the sequence of events here we rely mainly on the Holy Mother's own account. She says, 'Then (at the time of Chandramani Devi's death) I was ill—I had gone to my village home after suffering for a year at

company and help her in her domestic duties. And soon after, Hridaya's wife also joined her there.

The Mother cooked the Master's food there according to his taste and needs and carried it to his room, where she sat till he had finished. For looking after the comforts of the Mother or for her satisfaction, the Master, too, often visited the cottage during the daytime and spent some time with her. One day it rained so heavily just after his arrival there, that unable to return, he had to finish his meal there and then lie down for the night. From the bed he said to the Mother laughing, 'This is as though I have come home like any priest of the Kali temple going home at night.'

The Mother could not live in this thatched shed for long. She had to return to the Nahabat for attending on the Master who, as we said, had a bad attack of dysentery. As the Master became too weak to walk far away from the room, the Mother used to come from the new house to help him. Just then, fortuitously enough, an aged woman came to the Kali temple from Banaras. Little or nothing was known about her past, and we know even less of her life after the Dakshineswar days. She came like a flash of lightning for fulfilling a divine duty, and disappeared completely when it was over. The Holy Mother searched in vain for her when she went to Banaras. This aged woman volunteered to serve the Master, but realizing that for various reasons she was not equal to the task, she told the Mother, 'It's odd, my dear, that you should be staying here when he is so ill there!' The Mother replied, 'How can I help it? How can my nephew's wife be left alone? My nephew Hridaya is there with the Master.' The woman said, 'Let them carry on as best as they can. Does it befit you now to be

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Dakshineswar. After I had visited (Dakshineswar) twice or thrice...Shambbu Babu had the house constructed...In that house I stayed for some days...At last an aged woman from Banaras persuaded me and had brought me to the Nahabat from the house...Next time (fourth time) myself, my mother, Lakshmi, and some others came to Dakshineswar.' Shambu Babu gifted the house on 11-4-1876 and he passed away in 1877.

away from him?' The Mother admitted the force of this and shifted to the Nahabat to engage herself in the Master's service more completely.

Up till now the Mother had remained veiled before the Master. The Banaras woman one night took her to the Master and in his presence removed her veil. The Master, who was in an ecstatic mood, went on discoursing about divine things which kept them spell-bound. It was dawn when he stopped and they took leave of him.

It is not known when the Mother went again to Jayrambati. But about her return to Dakshineswar for the fourth time, she herself said, 'Well, the next time my mother, Lakshmi, myself and some others went to Dakshineswar. I made a votive offering of my hair and nails at Tarakeswar for recovery from my last ailment. As (my brother) Prasanna was with us, we first went to his rented house in Calcutta. It was perhaps in the month of March (1881). Next day, we all went to Dakshineswar. No sooner were we there than Hridaya for some reason best known to him, said, "Why have they come? What have they got to do here?" He showed his disrespect to them in this way. My mother made no reply to all this. Hridaya was a man of Shihar and my mother too was a girl of that village. Hridaya utterly ignored my mother when she said, "Come, let us go back home; with whom shall I leave my daughter here?" For fear of Hridaya, the Master kept mum all through. We all left that very day. Ramlal called a boat for crossing the river.'

With the deepest disappointment the Mother left,—she could not stay at Dakshineswar even for a day! Apart from this solitary grievance, the unassuming selfless wife had no complaint against the Master at all, or any ill-feeling towards her nephew. But all her sorrows and all her complaints were laid at the feet of the Almighty whose will rules everywhere. And so at the time of departure, she told Mother Kali Who dwelt within her mind, 'Mother, I shall revisit this place only if You will have me here again.'

If the Almighty rejected a supplicant who had absolutely surrendered herself, whom else could she implore for righting the wrong? The futile fourth visit thus ended abruptly.

Hridaya, in the pride of his heart, transgressed the limits of courtesy. May be, he had some satisfaction at this apparent triumph. But the unseen hand of destiny was shaping his future in another way. This was not the first instance of his rudeness to the Holy Mother. On another occasion Sri Ramakrishna who noticed such misbehaviour reprimanded him saying, 'My dear Hride, you may be talking to this (pointing to his own body) slightingly, but don't you do so to her. If the one that is in this (body) raises its hood, you may still be saved; but if the one that is in her raises its hood even Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshwara cannot save you.' Egotistic as Hridaya had become, the warning made no impression on his hard heart; and so, through the force of circumstances he had to leave the temple precincts for good to clear the way for the Mother's return. Through his foolhardiness he worshipped on the anniversary day of the opening of the temple (June, 1881), the little daughter of Trailokyanath, a son of Mathur Babu, as the divine Gauri;[1] whereupon Trailokya fearing that some evil would befall the girl, dismissed Hridaya from his service.

Then the Master's nephew Ramlal succeeded Hridaya as the priest of Kali. On getting this promotion he was elated with the thought, 'How grand! I have become the priest of Mother Kali,' and became unmindful of his duty towards Sri Ramakrishna. The Master used to be very frequently in *samadhi*, so that unless somebody reminded him of the *prasada* sent from the temple and coaxed him to eat it, it would lie in his room uncared for and become stale or dried up. There was none besides Ramlal who

1. It is usual to adore little brahmin girls as symbols of the divine Mother. Trailokya a non-brahmin feared that the worship of his daughter by a brahmin would spell ruin.

could really serve the Master with devotion. So, the Master suffered, and he sent word to the Mother through people who happened to go to those parts, to rejoin him at Dakshineswar. Thus through Lakshman Pain he sent the message: 'I am suffering here; Ramlal has joined the other priests after becoming the priest of Mother Kali, and he does not now look after me properly. You must come, be it by a *doli*[1] or a palanquin; and I shall meet the expenses, be they ten rupees or twenty.' This earnest call made the Mother at last come to Dakshineswar (probably in February-March, 1882). This was her fifth visit after staying away for about a year.

The next time she went to Jayrambati, she spent there some seven or eight months, coming back to Dakshineswar in January-February, 1884. It was at this time that the Master tumbled down when in a state of ecstasy, and as a result had a bone in the left hand dislocated. As soon as the Mother entered the Master's room and saluted him, placing the bundle of clothes on the floor, he inquired, 'When did you start?' Ascertaining from her reply that she had started in the afternoon of a Thursday, which is regarded as extremely inauspicious, he said, 'There it is! I got my hand injured because you started on Thursday afternoon. Go back; go and make a fresh start.' The Mother wanted to leave that very day; but the Master said, 'Stay today; you can go tomorrow.' The very next day the Mother left for her village home to recommence the journey on a more auspicious day.

It is not known when the Mother went home from Dakshineswar again, nor when she returned. But it is a fact that she was at Kamarpukur at Ramlal's marriage in 1884 and returned to Dakshineswar in the beginning of the next year. From this time on, most probably she did not visit Jayrambati again during the Master's lifetime.

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1. A litter, being a cheaper and smaller prototype of the palanquin.

We have tried to be as accurate as possible about the number and times of the Mother's journeys between Jayrambati and Dakshineswar; but in getting a more accurate idea, we have to take another factor into consideration. During the period beginning with the date of completion of the Master's austerity up to the year 1880, he used to go to Kamarpukur every year during the rains and spend there three or four months. His physicians advised him to go to the country at that time of the year to recoup his health which had been impaired by austerity. It is known that when steamers began to ply from Calcutta to Ghatal on the river Rupnarayana, the Master once went home with the Mother and Hridaya along that route. They got down from the steamer probably at Bandar and then proceeded by boat to Bali-Dewanganj which lies about eight miles south of Kamarpukur. That was a Vaishnava village. A merchant of the Modaka caste of that village cherished the idea of accommodating some saintly man in his new house for three nights. After the arrival of the Master and the Mother, the weather became so inclement that they had to spend three nights at the house. On the fourth day they went to Hriday's village, Shihar. It was during this visit that the Master inspired the people around by joining the *kirtana* parties at Shihar and Shyambazar, who sang continuously for days.

The Master visited Jayrambati quite a number of times. Whenever he happened to be at Kamarpukur, he used to be taken to Shihar, and he would visit Jayrambati on the way stopping there sometimes for more than a week. During one of these nights at Jayrambati, when all were asleep, the Master suddenly got up and said that he was hungry. The women of the house were in a quandary, for as a consequence of a feast that day, no food was left over except a little rice soaked in a pot of water. The Mother passed on the information to the Master with not a little hesitation, for that was not the kind of food to be offered to a guest at that hour of the night. But the

Master said, 'Fetch it.' 'But there's no curry,' put in the Mother. 'Why not make a little search?' suggested the Master. 'Do see, if even a little of the curry you prepared is left in the pan.' The Mother found a little bit of curry and placed this before the Master which made him very happy and he satisfied his hunger with the food thus got together.

The Mother usually covered the distance from Jayrambati or Kamarpukur to Dakshineswar on foot. Once when some village women started for Calcutta for a dip in the Ganges on some sacred day, the Mother, too, accompanied them with her nephew Sivaram and her niece Lakshmi Devi. Her idea was to stay on at Dakshineswar after the holy bath. It was settled that their first halt should be at Arambagh which was eight miles from Kamarpukur; for in front lay the uninhabited, notorious stretches of fields called Telo-bhelo which were infested with robbers. People would not cross them alone even in daylight. As a reminder of those fearful days there is still the terrible image of the goddess Kali in the heart of Telo-bhelo which the robbers used to invoke before engaging in their nefarious activities. The image is still called the robbers' Kali. On the day we are speaking of, the party from Kamarpukur decided after reaching Arambagh that there was plenty of time left for a moderate walker to reach Tarakeswar before it became too dark and that it was not wise to waste a day for rest which was not really wanted. The Mother was well-known even from her early age for her unobtrusiveness; if need arose she would endure discomfort to make it easier for others. In the present instance too, she restarted with them, though she knew well enough that her tired legs could not bear such prolonged strain. Soon she began to lag behind others. Her companions halted three or four times to allow her to

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1. From a foot-note on p. 12 of the 2nd edition of the fifth part of the *Kathamrita* it seems that at this time the Master stayed in those parts from 3rd March to 13th October, 1880.

catch up with them. But when at last they were convinced that she could not keep pace with them and that such slow movement would expose all to inevitable danger or even death, and when on top of all this the Mother asked them not to worry about her but to go forward, they quickened their steps and were soon lost to sight, while the Mother trudged on all alone.

When the sun set and the darkness of night began fast enveloping everything around, the Mother was still plodding on across the solitary fields of Telo-bhelo, full of anxiety, but finding no way out. Just then she noticed a tall figure emerging out of the darkness and approaching her. When the figure had drawn sufficiently near, the Mother saw that it was a man of deep dark colour and thick long hair who had a stout staff on his shoulder and silver bangles round his wrists. She knew that he was a robber, and terror-stricken, she halted at once. The man had no difficulty in understanding her mind, and with a view to terrifying her all the more he said in a harsh voice, 'Hullo! Who is that standing there at this time? Where would you go?' 'Eastward,' said the Mother. 'This is not the way there; you have to go that way,' said the man. The Mother still made no movement, and the man came very close. But as he looked at the Mother's face, there came a sudden change in his demeanour, and the cruel man-hunter said softly, 'Don't be afraid; I have a woman with me who has fallen back.' At this the Mother's eyes were taken off the immediate danger and extended further off where, sure enough, a woman was moving up. Then she got encouraged and said, 'Father, my companions have left me behind, besides, methinks, I have lost my way. Will you kindly take me to them? Your son-in-law lives in the Kali temple of Rani Rasmani at Dakshineswar. I am on my way to him. If you take me to that place he will treat you very cordially.' The woman came up before the Mother had finished and the latter took hold of her hand with full confidence and affection and said, "Mother, I am your daughter Sarada; I was in a terrible

plight having been left behind by my companions. Fortunately you and father appeared; otherwise I can't say what I would have done.' This simple behaviour, extreme confidence, and sweet disposition conquered the hearts of the robber couple who belonged to the lowly Bagdi caste. As a result they forgot the gulf of social difference that separated them from a brahmin woman and consoling her as though she was truly a daughter of theirs, did not allow her to proceed further because she was tired. They took her to a little shop nearby, where the woman improvised a bed for her with her clothes and other things and the man brought some fried-rice for her to eat. Then she was laid to rest with extreme affection, the man keeping guard at the door with his staff.

At dawn, when they were on their way to Tarakeswar, the Bagdi mother picked up green peas from the field for the Holy Mother. The latter accepted the affectionate gift like a little girl and put them in her mouth. They reached Tarakeswar about an hour and a half after sunrise. Here the Bagdi woman said to her husband, 'My daughter had nothing to eat at night; finish the worship of the Lord Tarakeswar (Shiva) soon, and bring some good things from the market; she has to be fed properly today.' When the man was out, the companions of the Holy Mother who had been out in search of her came to that place and were delighted to find her safe. Then the Mother introduced them to her Bagdi mother who had given her shelter on the previous night and said, 'If they had not appeared and saved me, I don't know what I would have done last night.'[1]

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1. There is a little controversy in the printed literature whether the Mother had any companion with her. The *Lilaprasanga, Divyabhava* (pp. 260-64) says categorically that there was none. The controversy seems to have arisen because of the Mother's reluctance to be adequately communicative about the circumstances of the incident. Once when she was questioned about this before Swami Ishanananda, the Mother avoided a direct answer and then told the Swami in confidence, 'See, what a fuss they make about hearing this robber story again and again. I don't want to talk. Lakshmi, Shibu, and

It is no longer possible to ascertain how this event was viewed by the pilgrims from Kamarpukur who were uncultured and steeped in caste prejudices. Nor can we gauge how far they realized the full import of that extraordinary drama of affection that was enacted on the solitary field at nightfall, and the intimate relationship that was established between the robber couple who belonged to a very low caste and the brahmin girl who was picked up at that odd hour from a very odd place. Nor do we get any inkling of any light having flashed across the minds of those ignorant villagers with regard to the victory of that sacred, though as yet unfolded motherhood over the cruelty of the robber, or the supremacy of light over darkness when the two came into conflict. As unbiased witnesses, we only find the Holy Mother, the robber couple, and the Kamarpukur pilgrims co-operating like a family in a common endeavour for their noon-day meal, and after finishing it in a very cordial atmosphere, starting for Baidyabati on the way to Calcutta.

The Mother and the Bagdi couple had drawn so close to one another during that single night, that all the three began to shed profuse tears at the thought of separation. As the pilgrims moved onward, the Bagdi couple accompanied them for some distance, and the woman picked up some peas with eager hands from the fields and tying them to the hem of the Mother's garment said in a choked voice, 'Dear daughter Sarada, when you chew your fried-rice at night, add these to it.' At last the Holy Mother got a promise from the couple that they would visit Dakshineswar and then managed to take leave of them. The couple kept their promise visiting Dakshineswar more than once with various gifts for the Mother. Sri Ramakrishna, coming to know the whole

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others, though they were with me, left me. Now if that question arises they would feel sore and look small. Howsover that might have been, they are my nephew and my niece. If I go on repeatedly narrating the incident they become dishonoured . So I avoid the point. Others don't understand it. It's no good asking me again and again.' In fact, the Mother did not admit the presence of anybody else.

incident behaved with them like a true son-in-law. The Mother, however, when relating the incident to the devotees ended it with this significant remark: 'Though my robber parents were so simple and well-behaved, still it strikes me that they did commit robbery off and on in their earlier days.' In other words, she never looked upon that thrilling incident on that lonesome plain of Telo-bhelo as an ordinary event.

It is beyond our capacity to imagine an adequate reason for the sudden change of mind of the robbers. It might have been that the uncommon guilelessness of the Mother and her immaculate holiness exerted an irresistible influence on their minds or it might have been that some supernormal factor was at work. That the second surmise is not baseless is apparent from what the Holy Mother told a devotee in the course of a conversation. It had reached the ears of the devotees that when the Mother once asked her Bagdi parents, 'Why, my dears, are you so attached to me?' they replied, 'You are not, in fact, an ordinary mortal, for we saw you as Kali.' 'How you speak my dears! How could you have seen me so?' remonstrated the Mother. Unabashed they said in an aggrieved voice, 'No, Mother, there was no mistake about what we saw. You want to hide this from us since we are sinners.' To this the Mother said indifferently, 'Who knows? I am not in the least aware of it.'[1]

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1. Shri Ashutosh Mitra in the Bengali book, *Shri Ma* (pp. 31-32) depicts the concluding portion of the event thus: The Mother says, "The Man was a Bagdi by caste. With a harsh voice like that of a robber he demanded, "Who art thou!" and he kept on looking at me with his mouth wide agape.' A devotee inquired, 'What did the robber see as he looked at you thus?' The Mother said, 'He talked afterwards of having seen me as Kali.' The devotee said, 'Then you revealed yourself to him as Kali. Speak out, Mother don't hide it, Please.' The Mother said, 'Why should I reveal it? He said that he saw me as Kali.' The devotee said, 'That's all the same—you revealed yourself.' The Mother said with a smile, 'You may take it that way if you like it so.'

8

A LIGHT UNDER A BUSHEL

Whenever the Mother was at Kamarpukur or at Dakshineswar, she usually had with her either her mother-in-law, or the Bhairavi Brahmani, or her sister-in-law, or Hridaya, who regulated her movements in many ways. Hence, though her relation with the Master was most intimate, its outer expression had some extraneous influence imposed upon it. Now we shall study the divine relationship between the Master and the Mother unencumbered by any extraneous influence whatever. And yet in their free and sweet interchanges there was no meaningless sentimentalism, no mere emotional exuberance. In everything she did, the Mother was calm and collected without being lifeless, and bright and transparent without being blinding. It requires the closest attention to comprehend fully the different forms that the purity and modesty of the Mother took in the midst of this self-regulated freedom.

Apart from the few days that the Mother lived in the thatched house built by Shambhu Babu, she spent the rest of her Dakshineswar days in the small Nahabat[1]. Those were extremely uncomfortable days; and the Mother, too, felt similarly. She said, 'When I was at the Nahabat for serving the Master, in what discomfort I had to live in that small room, and what a lot of things lay huddled together there! Sometimes, I was all alone...Golap, Gaur-dasi and others stayed there now and then. Ex-

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1. The Nahabat is a two-storeyed brick structure, about 75 ft. north of the Master's room. It is on the Ganges, on the way to the Panchavati where the Master used to meditate. The room downstairs is octagonal in shape, each wall measuring 3′ 3″ inside and the maximum distance between the walls across the floor being 7′ 9″. The floor area is a little less than 50 sft. Round the room is a verandha 4′3″ in width more or less. The only opening, a door on the southern side, measure 4′ 2″ ×2′ 2″. On the eastern side of the verandha is the staircase leading upstairs. Under this the Mother had her kitchen. During the Mother's stay, the verandah was surrounded by a thin screen of plaited bamboo chips.

tremely small though the room was, yet in it were carried on cooking, sleeping, eating,—why, everything. Cooking was done for the Master, for often enough, he suffered from poor digestion, and the *prasada* of Kali did not suit him. There was cooking for the devotees too. Latu was there; he came there having quarrelled with Ram Datta. The Master said, "This is a fine boy; he will knead the dough for you." There was no end to cooking, night or day. Ram Datta, for instance, came there and called out as soon as he alighted from the carriage, "I shall take today gram soup and *chapati*[1]." No sooner I heard this, than I started cooking here. There used to be *chapatis* made out of six to eight pounds of flour. Rakhal stayed here (with the Master); very often *khichudi* was cooked for him. Surendra Mitra used to pay ten rupees every month for the expenses of the devotees. Senior Gopal used to get things from the market.[2] ..In the beginning my head would strike frequently against the door-frame as I entered the room; one day I even suffered a bad cut. But gradually I got used to it, and my head would bend as I approached the door. Fat women from Calcutta used to come to visit me, and standing at the doorway and holding the door-frame on either side with both hands, they would say, "Alas! In what a room our dear good lady is living—it's like living in banishment" ..I used to bathe at four in the morning. Whenever there was a little sunhine on the steps in the afternoon, I used to get my hair sunned. There was only one room on the ground floor of the Nahabat, and that was stacked with

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1. Indian bread made of wheat flour flattened into round discs and baked in fire.

2. Of the persons mentioned here Golap (or Golap-Ma) and Gaurdasi (or Gauri-Ma) were women devotees of the Master, the former afterwards becoming a constant companion of the Mother. Latu, Rakhal, and Senior Gopal (or Gopal-dada) renounced the world, assuming the names Swami Adbhutananda, Swami Brahmananda, and Swami Advaitananda. The last named was older even than the Master and hence had the epithet 'Senior'. The rest were all lay disciples.

goods. Overhead were slings on which were hung potfuls of domestic titbits...The worst source of incovenience was inadequacy of the facilities for bathing and personal cleanliness.[1] Through forced confinement I developed physical trouble...And those fisherwomen were my companions. When they came for a bath in the Ganges, they kept their baskets on the verandah and went down for their dip. They talked a lot with me and took away their baskets when returning home. At night I heard the fishermen sing as they caught fish.'

The Mother lived on the ground floor of the Nahabat and cooked below the staircase. She was too shy to come out during the daytime. Yogin-Ma thus described the Mother's daily routine at the Nahabat: 'Finishing her bath before four o'clock in the morning the Holy Mother sat for meditation; for the Master used to insist on meditation. Then she commenced her worship after finishing her other duties. The worship, *japa* (telling of beads), and meditation would take about an hour and a half. Then she sat for cooking under the staircase. When the cooking was over, if she got the opportunity, she would rub oil on the Master's body with her own hands before his bath. The Master sat for his dinner between half past ten and eleven. Whenever he went for his bath, the Mother hurriedly prepared betel rolls for him as she kept on watching for his return. When he retuned, the Mother would spread a small carpet for him to sit on for his meal, and keep ready a glass of drinking water. Then she would carry to him a plate of food. As he sat for his meal, she would converse on various topics just taking care lest his meal should be spoiled by any upsurge of spiritual emotion. None but the Mother could prevent such sudden upsurges during meal time. When the Master had finished eating, the

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1. There was no bath-room. When Yogin-Ma, a woman devotee of the Master and later a constant companion of the Mother, visited Dakshineswar, she noticed all this and took up the matter with the others. As a result there was some minor improvement.

Mother would hurriedly take something herself and drink a glass of water. Then she would make betel rolls. That over, she would sing in a low tone, and that very cautiously lest she should be overheard. Then when the mill blew the whistle at one o'clock, she sat down for her food, so that her lunch was never finished before half past one or two. After food she would take some nominal rest and then would sit down on the steps at about three for drying her hair. Then she would turn to trimming the lights and doing other odd bits of work, and then get ready for evening duties after somehow washing her body and clothes with the little water she kept in the Nahabat. When evening came, she would light the lamps and after waving the censer with the burning incense before the deities, sit for meditation. This was usually followed by cooking for the night, and the Mother would have her supper after all had finished. At last she would lie down after a little respite.'

Once, before dawn, when she was getting down the steps for a bath in the Ganges she almost trod on a crocodile which taking alarm at the Mother's approach jumped into the river. Thenceforth, she never went for a bath without a lantern.

Numerous inconveniences and handicaps, heavy duties and troubles were there; but the Mother never really worried about them. In later days, when casually alluding to all these troubles, she would sum up saying, 'Yet I knew no other suffering..No discomfort could touch me if it was for his (Master's) service. The day passed on joyously and quietly amidst everything.' Some may fancy that there was nothing unusual in this her sense of joy. For was it not really good luck to live near the great Master, that fountain of bliss who drew large crowds to Dakshineswar, and whose sweet words charmed thousands into forgetting all the worries and anxieties of life in his presence? This attitude may appeal to those who do not care to look at the matter more deeply. But how many in real life feel that kind of attraction for the Master even after knowing

so much of his greatness? How many even during his life did so, and how many among those who felt that love stayed on at Dakshineswar? We have also to remember that the Holy Mother whose life revolved round the Master alone, had seldom even a distant view of him. She said, 'Sometimes even during as long a period as two months, I could'nt see him even once. I composed myself by saying "O mind, what merit have you earned that you will get his *darshan* (sight) every day?" Standing erect (behind the screen of plaited bamboo chips, with which the verandah of the Nahabat was surrounded), I used to hear the lines that he sometimes added extempore to the *kirtana* songs. This produced rheumatism.' Would but one stop to consider for a while the absolute purity of heart and incomparable love that are necessary for standing long hours behind a screen just for the sake of having an incomplete glimpse of the Master through a hole and deriving pleasure thereby! Though the Mother was then physically separated from the Master, her heart ever hovered around him. The number of devotees visiting the Master at that time was quite considerable, and throughout the day and till late into the night there was a continuous flow of music solo or choral, dancing, and ecstatic moods. The Mother saw and heard these and thought within herself, 'If but I were one of the devotees over there, I would then be ever so near the Master, and would hear so many things!' Here on one side is the new Incarnation giving free and varied expression to his message for the age, and on the other side is the Mother of the Universe keeping herself under the voluntary restraints of a monotonous life; on the one side is sparkling disport and on the other eager gazing—this is altogether a rare phenomenon! Those days might have had their ups and downs. Near as she was, she was still very far; and yet in the memory of the Holy Mother the troubles and tribulations of those days were obliterated as she looked back lingeringly at the bliss that suffused her life as a whole in spite of all impediments; and she said, 'In what bliss I was! What a

curiously mixed crowd of people came to see him then! Dakshineswar used then to be a mart of joy!'

The Master was not, of course, unmindful of her comforts; on the contrary he tried to keep her happy in every way. He called that little room a cage, surrounded as it was by bamboo chips. Lakshmi Devi, his niece, too, often stayed there. The Master called them in fun a pair of parrots. When Mother Kali's *prasada* was sent from the temple to the Master's room, he said to his nephew Ramlal, 'Hullo! There is that pair of parrots in the cage. Carry to them some gram and fruits.' New comers naturally thought that there were some real birds; even Master Mahashaya[1] laboured long under that wrong impression. When Lakshmi Devi was not there, the thought of the rheumatism and loneliness of the Holy Mother worried the Master very much. He said to her, 'If a wild bird lives in a cage it becomes rheumatic; you should go out now and then to have a stroll in the neighbourhood.' He did not stop with this. When visitors had left the temple premises at noon, he would go to her and ask her to walk out through the backdoor to spend some time with the wife of one Sri Pandye. The Mother used to return after the evening services when the Panchavati side became quiet again.

Sometimes the Master created funny situations as though to impress on others the unique intimacy of the relationship that he had with the Mother. Once when a discussion arose whether the Master or a certain devotee had a fairer skin, the Master appointed the Mother as the umpire. He told her that she would have to watch them and formulate her opinion as they walked by the Nahabat northward of the Panchavati. The Master's colour was at that time fair and bright like pure gold and could hardly be distin-

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1. Mahendranath Gupta, the writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in Bengali. As he was a teacher in a High School, the devotees called him Master. Mahashaya means a dignified man, and is equivalent to 'Mr'.

guished from the gold amulet on his arm. Yet, the Mother, an impartial judge, pronounced her verdict in favour of his rival.

In fact, the current of love of this divine couple was equally strong at either bank; the Master was as warmly attached to the Mother as she was to him. Gauri-Ma once said, 'Though these two sometimes did not see each other for six months together, in spite of being only about seventy-five feet apart, how deep indeed was their love for each other!' Once when the Mother had a headache the Master felt extremely anxious and went on asking Ramlal again and again: 'O Ramlal, why does that headache trouble her?'

The Master saw to it that the Mother was not needlessly overburdened with work, busy as she was the whole day. Once while on a walk with Rakhal in the garden of Beni Pal of Sinthi, he came across some ghosts who implored him to leave the garden, as the holy atmosphere he diffused around him was too strong for them to bear. It had been arranged earlier that he would spend the night in the garden; but the importunity of the spirits made him change the plan at once. He called a carriage and returned to the temple premises at dead of night when the gate was closed. He got it opened and walked in. The Mother, whose mind was ever eager for any opportunity of service to him, got up at the sound of his steps and said to the maidservant, 'O Jadu's-mother, how shall we manage?' They were talking in the Nahabat; but the Master's careful ears caught the sound. He sized up the situation at once and said, 'Don't you worry, my dears, we have had our meals already.'

The question of the Mother's maintenance after his passing away was also present in his mind. Though detachment from worldly affairs was a point of faith with him, he asked the Mother, 'How much money would you require for your personal needs?' The Mother replied, 'I can manage it with, say, five or six rupees.' Then he inquired, 'How many

chapatis do you eat in the evening?' The Mother blushed at this personal question and hung her head in shame without answering. But the Master went on repeating his question and she had to reply at last, 'Say, five or six.' On that basis the Master calculated and said, 'Then it'll be quite enough if you have five or six hundred rupees.' Afterwards he deposited that amount of money with Balaram Babu[1] who invested it in his own estate and sent her thirty rupees every half year as the accruing income.

It is a wonder to think how a god-intoxicated soul like the Master could keep his attention fixed on so many things. Adored as God by devotees who were ever at his beck and call, he could never be unmindful of her prestige and independence. As for his courtesy towards the Mother, we get an attestation from her own words: 'I was fortunate to be wedded to a husband who never addressed me as thou (*tui*). The Master never hurt me even with a flower, never called me "thou" in place of "you" (*tumi*).'[2] One day the Mother carried to the Master's room his scanty dishes consisting of very thin pieces of cake (made by spreading liquid flour on a flat frying pan) and *soojee* (semolina) porridge. As she was leaving the room after placing the dishes at the proper place, the Master thought it was his niece Lakshmi and called out, 'Mind, thou (*tui*) shuttest the door.' The Mother said, 'Yes, here I close it.' Recognizing the Mother's voice, he became greatly embarrassed and apologized, 'Ah, it's you! I thought it was Lakshmi. Don't you mind this.' Nay, that unintentional disrespect upset him so much that the very next morning he went to the Mother's door and said, 'Look here, my dear, I had no sleep last night, because of brooding over my rudeness to you.' As an illustration of the honour in

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1. A staunch devotee of the Master and one of his *rasad-dars* (suppliers of needs), who lived in Calcutta but had estates in Orissa.

2. In Bengali *tui* (thou, Hindi *tu*) is used for addressing inferiors or little ones, *tumi* (you, Hindi *tum*) for friends, equals, parents, brothers, sisters etc; and *apani* (Hindi *ap*) for respected persons.

which the Holy Mother was held by the Master who regarded all women as the veritable manifestation of the Mother of the Universe, he told the devotees that he saluted the Mother after she had rubbed his feet with her hands. On another occasion he said, 'I wanted to go to a a certain place. When Ramlal's aunt (the Mother) was consulted she forbade me; so I gave up the idea.'

Though the Master thus honoured the Mother and treated her with utmost consideration, he knew that there was a wide difference between them in age and experience. Moreover, there was none else to instruct the Mother either about worldly matters or about spiritual practices. So he himself gladly shouldered the duty. For instance, he said to the Mother, 'One has to work; women should not sit idle, for if one sits idle, many vain thoughts, nay evil ideas, may crop up.' The Mother once said, 'He brought me some raw jute and said, "Twist this and make slings for me; I shall keep (in them) sweets, etc., for the boys." I twisted it into strings and made slings; and with the waste fibres and a piece of thick cloth I made a pillow. I used to spread a coarse mat over a piece of hessian and put that pillow under my head. I slept as soundly on those things as I do now on these (cots, etc.,)—I don't find any difference, my child!'

In fact, owing to her own nature and the teaching of the Master, she followed his instruction, 'Adapt yourself to time, space, and person,' so perfectly, that even the Master once said to Hridaya in wonder: 'O Hridu, I had great apprehension, lest she, a village girl, should, by her rustic behaviour incur public criticism and put us to shame. But as to that she is so cautious that nobody knows her movements; even I never saw her going out.' The Master undoubtedly meant this as a compliment. But the Mother became very much worried, thinking, 'Ah me! The Mother of the Universe actualizes for him whatever idea crosses his mind; and now, methinks, I shall catch his eyes whenever I go out.' To avert this she prayed, 'O Mother,

kindly protect my modesty.' That prayer was so fully granted that though she lived at Dakshineswar for a long time, she escaped public gaze so completely that the cashier of the temple, the chief resident officer, when asked about her said once, 'I have heard that she is here; but I have never seen her.'

Though the Mother was very shy and effaced herself completely, subduing herself to the will of the Master, yet in one respect she maintained her independence and that was in the domain of her motherhood. Of this we shall have many instances; for the present we shall deal with three only. The Mother had not many companions then; the fisherwomen came frequently; a maid-servant too, was there for some time; and at times there would be a few women visitors from Calcutta. The number of devotees was not very large. At that time there used to come to her an old woman who had lived a somewhat loose life in her youth; but now like a devotee she prayed to the Lord and came often alone to the Mother who talked in a friendly spirit. Noticing this, the Master said one day, 'Why is that woman here?' The Mother expostulated, 'She talks now only of Hari. What's the harm in that?' The Mother knew that human nature changes, that even evil characters repent and become good. On the other hand, the Master's sense of duty warned him that the Holy Mother should be protected from the company of persons who might come with impure motives. Besides, intimacy with such undesirable people might rouse adverse criticism from worldly-minded visitors. So he said with disdain, 'Pooh, pooh! a public woman! To think of chatting with her, whatever the extenuating factors! What a nasty idea!' The Mother certainly understood the need for caution. Whatever might have been her past, she now trod the path of virtue and looked upon the Holy Mother as her own mother. How could the Holy Mother then drive away one who wanted to be comforted—the Mother whose life was to be a solace to thousands of sinners and spiritual wanderers? And all that cruelty she

was to show for the sake of mere social propriety! The conversations, therefore, went on as before even after the Master's observation. The Master too, intuitively understanding the Mother's feeling, did not refer to the matter again.

Subsequently, when visitors became more numerous and fruits and sweets and other offerings were placed at the feet of the Master in plenty, he used to send these to the Nahabat. It was found, however, that apart from the little that was needed for the Master, the Mother did not care to retain them, but gave them away freely to the women and young devotees and the children of the neighbourhood who came to her. Her mother's heart would not allow her to send away any visitor or devotee without giving him or her some fruit or sweet. In this she was liberal to a fault. One day when she had thus used up everything, Gopal's Mother[1] cried out, 'My dear daughter-in-law, why have you not reserved anything for my Gopal!' The Mother hung her head in shame. Just then Navagopal Babu's wife alighted from a carriage and handed over to her some sweets and saved the situation. The Mother did not learn her lesson still, or perhaps it was impossible for her to change her nature. The Master too, knew of this extravagance, and just because he knew he argued with her one day in his room, 'How can it be managed if there is such extravagance?' At this the Mother quietly turned her back and walked away to the Nahabat. The Master now was in a quandary and said to his nephew, Ramlal, 'Hullo Ramlal, go and pacify your aunt. If she gets angry, everything will be undone with this (pointing to his body).' This was a voluntary defeat of the Master before the blossoming motherhood of Sarada Devi.

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1. An old lady disciple of the Master, who worshipped Krishna in His form of a little child. At the end of her long practice she was blessed with a constant vision of the Divine Child whom she subsequently identified with the Master. The Mother thus became her daughter-in-law.

The Mother was one day recounting the memories of those old days to Yogin-Ma and others, when Yogin-Ma suddenly inquired why the Mother seemed to be so wilful in certain matters, even against the Master's advice. The Mother said with a smile, 'As for that, Yogen (Yogin-Ma), can any one obey another in everything?' And she added after a little reflection, 'Well, my dear, whatever you may say, I shan't be able to turn away anybody if he addresses me as Mother.'

One day, she made this abundantly clear to the Master himself. In this last incident there is not only an example of selfless service at its highest, but it is also full of the fragrance of motherhood in its first bloom. As the Mother felt too shy to come into the Master's room in the presence of others, the room was cleared of people at night to enable her to serve the Master his food. One night when she had just stepped on to the verandah of the Master's room, a woman devotee suddenly came up and snatched away the plate of food saying, 'Give it to me, Mother, give it to me!' The woman placed the plate before the Master and left as quickly. The Master sat down for his meal; the Mother too, sat by him. But he could not touch the food and said looking at the Mother, 'What's this you have done? Why did you give it into her hands? Don't you know her? She is immoral. How can I now eat what has been defiled by her?' 'I know all that,' said the Mother, 'but, do please take this tonight.' The Master would not still touch it, but at the Mother's importunity said, 'Promise that you won't hand it over to anybody else hereafter.' With folded hands the Mother replied, 'That I cannot, Master! I shall certainly bring your food myself, but if any one begs me by calling me "Mother", I shan't be able to contain myself. Besides, you are not my Master alone, you are for all.' That cheered up the Master and he began eating.

9

WHEN HEART CALLS HEART

We have followed the Mother's doings as she moved about busily within the precincts of the Nahabat contented with glimpses of the Master from afar. That self-content with her work and association with the Master was only one side of her life, and not a very important one. She lived at Dakshineswar only for serving the Master meticulously, any personal benefit being only incidental and never her main objective. If that were not so, her mind would some day or other revolt against the monotonous drudgery and the rigid routine of the Nahabat, and would search for an escape from it. The remedy was not quite beyond her reach; for at Dakshineswar itself, not far away, there was the house built by Shambhu Babu, and none at the temple premises could object seriously if she chose to relax herself a little from the shackles with which she voluntarily bound herself. But we are not concerned here with a discussion of the possible means of the Mother's personal happiness; we want to delineate the kinds of service that she rendered primarily to the Master, and incidentally to his devotees as well. With this side of her life we are already partly acquainted, and we shall get more evidence of it as we proceed. We shall confine our attention mainly to the period beginning with the coming of the devotees and ending with the final illness of the Master.

Prior to the Mother's arrival at Dakshineswar and her dedication to the service of the Master, life was rather uneventful with him. But when towards the end of his austerity his power of digestion suffered, the Mother came upon the scene as if through divine direction, Hridaya left the temple premises, and the Master's health improved as a result of the most devoted service of the Mother,—all these factors made the Master depend more and more on her. If she happened to go anywhere, the childlike Master felt helpless, and would become extremely

anxious to bring her back. Such solicitude on the part of one who was ever absorbed in spiritual experience, may appear enigmatic to many; but from the Mother's point of view we easily realize that her service was so successful that it could rivet on her the attention of the mightiest spiritual giant that history has witnessed. The Mother massaged the Master's feet even as does Lakshmi sitting at Lord Narayana's feet; before bath she rubbed oil on his person; and prepared nourishing and palatable dishes for him according to his taste and condition of health. In short, she then forgot herself in him. And it was not perhaps possible even for a detached mind like that of Sri Ramakrishna's to be oblivious of such consecrated service, instances of which, as also of the Master's dependence on her, are numerous.

The Master had a weak liver. So the Mother cooked for him soups and curries that were easily digestible. Now, according to Hindu custom, a wife may not do so during certain days when her person is considered impure. During those few days the Master ate whatever came to him as *prasada* from the Kali temple and suffered as a consequence. So he asked the Mother one day, 'Look here, dear, my trouble has increased because you did not cook my food during these days. Why didn't you do so?' The Mother explained, 'Women can't cook for anybody during the days of their impurity.' 'Who says, they can't?' asked the Master, 'Do it for me, you won't incur any sin thereby. Would you explain, which part of your body is impure—skin, flesh, bone, or marrow? Know that purity and impurity reside in the mind; there's nothing impure outside.' After that the Mother always cooked for him. The Master, highly delighted at this, said, 'See, my dear, how healthy is my body by taking your dishes.'

Another account of this service the devotees heard from the Mother. Once Kaviraj[1] Gangaprasad Sen of

1. A physician who treats in accordance with the old Indian system of medicines called Ayurveda or science of life.

Kumartoli, Calcutta, was called in to cure the Master of an ailment. The Kaviraj asked the patient to give up water altogether during the treatment. Childlike as the Master was, he went on asking everybody, 'Well, dear, shall I be able to manage without drinking water?' The Mother said to him encouragingly, 'Most assuredly you will.' Still the Master said, by way of caution, 'Water has to be wiped off even the pomegranate seeds. Try if you can.' The Mother assured him, 'Well, that depends on how Mother Kali will have it. By Her grace I shall try my utmost.' Then he resolved to give up water. The Mother offered him plenty of milk daily and increased the quantity gradually without his being aware of it. The milkman who came to the temple-garden gave her the extra milk left unsold, and said, 'If I leave the milk there, those people will carry it home after it has been offered to Kali, and will give it to all kinds of people; whereas, if I leave it here, he (the Master) will drink it.' In exchange he got from the Mother all kinds of sweets and other things that lay at hand. The devotees used to bring those things plentifully, and so there was no dearth. She then condensed the milk to two or three pints by boiling. When the Master asked her, 'How much milk is there?' she referred only to the thickened milk and said, 'How much, indeed? It may be two or two and a half pints.' Not convinced, the Master would say, 'No, why then is there that thick layer of cream?' The Mother nevertheless coaxed him to drink the whole quantity. One day Golap-Ma was present at the meal time and the Master asked her, 'Well, my dear, what is the quantity of milk there?' Golap-Ma, unaware of the purpose behind the question gave out the quantity of the unboiled milk. Startled at this, the Master said, 'Ah, such a lot of milk! That's why I get indigestion. Call her, call her!' The Mother came and the Master inquired again, 'How much is the milk?' The Mother gave her usual reply. But the Master persisted, 'Why then Golap does speak of there being so much?' Unabashed, the

Mother explained, 'Golap knows nothing. What does Golap know of our measurement here? How can Golap know how much a pot contains?' The matter ended there that day. But on another occasion the Master again inquired of Golap-Ma and she said, 'One bowlful of milk from here and another from the Kali temple.' The Master started and said, 'Ah, what a quantity! Call her; ask her.' As soon as the Mother entered, the Master inquired, 'How much milk does the bowl contain—how many quarts and pints?' The Mother replied, 'I know nothing of quarts or pints. Who indeed cares for so much calculation?' The Master pleaded, 'Can any one digest so much? As it is, I shall have indigestion.' And, in fact, he had it that afternoon, so that he had to forgo his evening meal. The Mother gave him only a cup of sago. Noticing the action of the Master's thoughts and beliefs on his body, fully established in truth as he was, Golap-Ma told the Mother regretfully, 'Mother, you ought to have warned me. For, his meal is spoiled.' The Mother explained, 'A white lie for feeding one has nothing bad in it. I feed him by cajoling him thus.' That is to say, the Mother's attention was fixed not so much on formal veracity as on the improvement of the Master's health; and as a matter of fact, she found that he was putting on weight by drinking milk in plenty.

A word or two may be necessary by way of explanation for people who are wedded to a mere meticulous observance of conventional standards. When the Mother asked the Master not to be insistent about ascertaining the exact quantity of milk, she was, perhaps, following his own line of thought. Once the cashier of the temple paid the Master less than his monthly allowance through some mistake. When the Mother heard of it she suggested that it might be rectified by bringing it to the notice of that officer, at which the Master simply said, 'Bah! bah! To think that I should calculate!' In the present case too, the Mother, perhaps, wanted to defeat the Master through

his own psychological approach in order to make him drink the milk. Secondly, when we are discussing this topic, there flashes before our mind's eye the picture of a mother coaxing some dear, specially helpless, unthinking children, to take wholesome food. What a lot of irrelevant talk and fanciful stories they indulge in for feeding their dear little ones! In such cases no one dares charge them with lying or prevarication, nor does such a preposterous idea cross the mind. And what is morality after all? There is nothing absolute about it. We pronounce something good after referring it to a certain background for a comparative study. The rose is not all good, it has its thorns. And yet the blooming flower with captivating fragrance and with dew drops on the soft petals that reflect the morning light, makes us oblivious of its drawbacks and thus leaves only a sweet memory which is ever a source of delight. The loving words of mothers and other dear ones too are only a source of comfort and happiness and their memory also is equally charming. The Holy Mother did not end with mere endearing words; she used to press the rice with her hands to make the quantity appear less, so that the mere sight of it might not scare the Master. So long as the Master's mother was alive, he used to go to her and eat his food sitting before her. But, later on, the food was carried to his room by the Mother.

Whatever the motive of the Holy Mother might have been, her devotion to the Master's service often came into conflict with his naturally high-toned morality and uncompromising practical veracity; for though the two hearts beat in unison, they had to express their feelings through complex human media. And yet such apparent disharmony produced certain remarkable situations which were full of deep import for others. We have noticed how the truthful Master suffered physically on coming to learn that he had been taking more milk than he thought he was actually doing, though as a matter of fact the diet had

been improving his health all the time. We adduce another instance of this kind. One day the Master saw that the pouch in which were kept for him some digestive spices to chew at will, was empty, and he went to the Mother to get some. The Mother handed over to him a pinch of aniseeds and *ajowan* (lovage, *ptychotis Coptica*) and gave him a little more in a packet of paper saying, 'Take this.' He took it and started for his room; but as a man of renunciation he had vowed not to stock anything for the future. Hence this slight infringement had an adverse effect on him. Some unknown force carried him to the southern Nahabat on the Ganges. Not finding the way to his room, but rather the river in full tide, he said, 'Mother, should I drown myself, should I?' That was in the early days of the Mother's life at Dakshineswar. She was in a predicament, for being extremely shy, she could not rush to his rescue, nor could she stand quiet. Just then a brahmin of the temple happened to pass that way, with whose help she called in Hridaya and had the Master taken to his room. We should ponder a little to realize how difficult it was to serve this god-man. While men have their own methods of being pleased, and the gods have their hymns and worship, in the case of God in human form such as was the Master it seemed as if only a divine woman like the Holy Mother could meet all his requirements.

Though the Mother made the service of the Master the one goal of her life, she did not deprive others of the privilege; on the contrary, when occasion demanded, she made way for others, though such forced separation from the Master meant insufferable desolation for her. She used to carry his food to his room at night. But once the Master asked Golap-Ma to do so. From that day on, the Mother entrusted Golap-Ma with the task. The Mother could hitherto meet the Master at least once in a day; but the new arrangement deprived her of that opportunity. Golap-Ma's nature was such that, though she was a spiritual soul of a high order and had intense devotion for

both the Master and the Mother, she could not understand the feelings of others but was led by her own sentiments, and this to such an extent that, even when she meant no harm but rather tried to do a good turn to others, she in fact hurt people's feelings. Once she said to the Mother, 'Mother, Manomohan's mother[1] was complaining: "He (the Master) is very ascetic, and yet the Mother wears these ear-rings and other ornaments. Does that look nice?"' Defeated by worldly wisdom, the Mother laid away that very day all her ornaments except a pair of bangles. When next day Yogin-Ma came and argued against such false sentimentality, she put on one or two pieces, but she never again wore all of them; for, soon after the Master developed cancer in his throat, so that her mind could no longer think of personal adornment. Be that as it may, let us return to the topic of serving food. Golap-Ma used to be with the Master long after evening, sometimes she returned to the Nahabat at ten o'clock. This caused much inconvenience to the Mother; for she had to keep watch over the food in the verandah of the Nahabat. One night the Master heard her saying, 'It doesn't matter if a cat or a dog eats the food; I can't go on watching it.' He realized the difficulty of the Mother and warned Golap-Ma. But she followed her own line of thought and said, 'No, Mother loves me very much and addresses me as she would her own daughter.' It was not strange, therefore, that it took a woman of her temperament quite a long time to understand the feelings of the Mother and to entrust the duty to her again. For this long period the Mother kept her misery all to herself, remaining content with the glimpses she had of him from afar.

Absolutely selfless though this extraordinary service was, not all could appreciate it. Not only that, but it gave

1. Manomohan Mitra and his mother were devotees of the Master. Rakhal married Manomohan's sister before he renounced the world and became Swami Brahmananda.

rise to jealousy in the hearts of worldlings, which at times found expression in words, and hence such ignorant criticism did not totally escape the Mother's ears. Once a woman asked her bluntly, 'Why do you go to the Master?' The innocent Holy Mother took others' words at their surface value; moreover she ever tried not to be a cause of annoyance to others. Thus with a view to composing others' minds, she often invited unnecessary mortification on herself, and this she bore without a murmur. In the present case she readily understood that the woman sought an opportunity of serving the Master, and accordingly she refrained from her part of the work for some time. Those were painful days, for she had then nothing more than fleeting glimpses of the Master as he passed at nightfall by her door on his way to the *jhau* (tamarisk) grove in the north; and at times that privilege too was denied.

Nonetheless, life at Dakshineswar rolled on merrily; but Fate would not however allow this. In June 1885, there were symptoms of the Master's throat trouble which the doctors later diagnosed as cancer. The devotees realized that the disease could not be treated properly unless he was removed to Calcutta where alone proper medical care would be available. The Master, having consented, was taken to a rented house in Durgacharan Mukherji Street, in the Baghbazar area of the city. But the sight of the house repelled the Master who left immediately for Balaram Babu's house; for being used to the open spaces of the temple-garden on the wide river, he could not be persuaded to squeeze himself into those dingy rooms. Within a week another house was rented in Shyampukur Street, and the Master took his residence there in the beginning of October.[1] He was placed under the care of the well-known Homoeopath, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar.

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1. The *Lilaprasanga Divyabhava* (p. 257) puts it as the beginning of September. But in the *Bengali Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, he is found to be present at Dakshineswar on the 24th September, and at Shyampukur on the 18th October. So we put it as the beginning of October 1885.

The Mother continued her desolate life at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was not there, the opportunities of service had disappeared, and she was constantly put in mind of the evil prognostics the Master had made about his passing away. Four years before the cancer the Master had told her, 'When I eat indiscriminately from everybody's hand, spend the night in Calcutta, and partake of my food after offering part of it to someone, you will know that my last day is approaching.' Before the disease began, these omens had been coming true one by one. The Master had been going to various houses on invitation and partaking of all food except cooked rice served by all kinds of people; he had been spending nights now and then at Balaram Babu's house in Calcutta; and when Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda) once failed to visit Dakshineswar for a long time on account of some alimentary trouble, the Master had him brought there and made him partake of some portion of the soup and rice cooked for himself, the remaining portion of which he himself took afterwards. When the Mother objected and wanted to cook again, the Master said that he felt no hesitation in partaking of food of which a portion had been offered earlier to Narendra, and that the Mother need not apprehend any evil consequences or cook again. The Mother observed all this. But when the Divine Dispenser turns the wheel of fortune at His pleasure, others, though aware of the consequences and the remedy, can only watch and shed helpless tears. We can well realize how extremely forlorn the Mother felt at Dakshineswar when the Master was not there; we can understand that now and again the hard question was agitating her mind, 'Well, then, is he intent on ending his play here?' But who can believe an unpleasant truth? And even if there were no truth in the omens, what could she after all do in that helpless state? When the beloved disciples of the Master, with his own approval, made the arrangement for his cure, what else could the Mother do but silently smart under that ordeal. But her affliction was not to last long.

Soon after the Master was at Shyampukur, it became clear to the devotees that, side by side with medicines and personal attendance, there must be adequate arrangement for preparing diet. The young disciples could serve but not cook. And so the only way out of the difficulty was to bring the Mother there. But then, there was another insoluble problem. The house had no inner apartment for women; it really formed the outer apartment of a bigger house belonging to one Gokulchandra Bhattacharya. The devotees were at a loss to think how the Mother could live there; and remembering her preference for extreme seclusion, many doubted whether she would come at all. The Mother who avoided being seen by anybody in spite of her long residence at the Nahabat, could not be expected to get over this habit of privacy all of a sudden and live and move freely among men. And yet they had no alternative. Consequently the matter had to be put before the Master and his opinion sought. He too reminded them of the Mother's habit and said, 'Will she be able to come and live here? Anyway, you may try. If she agrees to come after knowing everything, let her do so.' The Master and his devotees based their misgivings on what they had known of the Holy Mother's temperament, but they forgot her wonderful power of adapting her life to the necessities of circumstances and her readiness to sacrifice all comfort and privacy for the sake of the Master. And as a matter of fact, as soon as the call came, she moved on to Shyampukur with alacrity and took up her duties there.

The house, No. 55, stands on the northern side of Shyampukur Street which stretches from east to west. As one entered the gate northward one found on either side a platform for sitting and a paved terrace. Further ahead on the right side were the stairs leading to the first floor and in front a courtyard, on the eastern side of which there were two or three small rooms. Going up, one found on the right a long room extending north and south, which was allotted to visitors. And on the left was the passage

leading to the rooms. The first door that one came across, as one proceeded along the passage, led to the big room in which the Master lived. It had verandas on north and south, and on the west two small rooms, one of which was the bedroom of the Holy Mother and the other of the devotees. On the eastern side of the passage to the Master's room was a staircase leading to the roof; and by the side of the door opening to the roof was a covered quadrangular terrace, where the Mother cooked for the Master and spent the whole day.

In that house there was only one place where bathing was possible and all had to bathe there. The Mother would finish her ablutions at three o'clock in the morning and go up the terrace on the second floor. When the diet for the Master was ready, she would send word downstairs through Gopal-dada (or Gopal-da) or Latu, and the visitors would then be asked to go out so that she might come down and feed the Master; or if that was not possible the young devotees would carry the food downstairs. The Mother would rest herself on the terrace at noon; and when all were asleep, she would come down to her own bedroom at about eleven o'clock at night. There she would sleep up to 2 a.m. This was her heavy and exacting routine for days on end in the service of the Master. But the wonder of it is that though hers was the most important part of the nursing, she carried on her work so silently in an unseen corner that not even the regular visitors suspected her presence.

After about two and a half months at Shyampukur, the doctor found that the Master's disease was increasing rather than decreasing, and he advised that he should be taken to some spacious garden house outside the city. Accordingly the devotees hired the premises No. 90, Cossipore Road, from Gopalchandra Ghosh; and the Master, along with the Mother and the young disciples, shifted there on the 11th December, 1885. The garden house lay on the eastern side of the Cossipore Road which runs northward from Calcutta. Almost at the middle of the northern boundary wall of the garden there were some three or four

small rooms meant as kitchen and store. In front of these, on the other side of the garden path, stood a two-storeyed dwelling house which had four rooms on the ground floor and two upstairs. Of the lower rooms, the one in the middle was like a hall. North of this were two small rooms side by side, the western one of which had a wooden staircase leading up to the rooms above, and the eastern one was the Mother's bedroom. The big hall, which extended east and west, and the room on the south of it, which had a small verandah on the east, were used by the devotees as bedrooms and sitting rooms. Over the hall there was another big room of equal dimensions, where the Master lived. South of this was an open terrace with a parapet all around where the Master sometimes sat or strolled. North of this was the roof over the stairs, and a room over the Mother's of equal size which was used for the Master's convenience or as a bedroom for some young devotees on duty.

Needless to say that the Mother felt more happy here inasmuch as she could serve the Master while not being hampered by as many constraints as before. The young devotees too continued to attend on the Master, and their number gradually swelled. Thus the malady of the Master became an occasion for the crystallization of the future Ramakrishna Order, at the centre of which naturally sat the Holy Mother as the presiding deity. Here, too, her daily routine remained almost the same; the slight changes that were made were for making it more convenient for the Master. Here also she cooked the usual things. If any special diet had to be prepared, Gopal-da or some one else with whom she could talk freely learnt the process from the physician and duly instructed her. A little before noon and a short while after evening, she carried the food to the Master and returned to her own room when his meal was over. At this time Lakshmi Devi was brought there to help her in the work and keep company. Besides, the women devotees who came to visit the Master, spent some time or lived with the Mother for a day or two. It is not known exactly

when Lakshmi Devi came there; it is also doubtful if the women devotees visited the Master frequently enough or if they stayed for any considerable period. The following incidents rather go to show that usually the Mother had no one to assist her even in an emergency.

The distance between successive steps of the wooden staircase mentioned earlier was so great that it required some effort even for healthy people to negotiate the ascent, while for weaker people it was a task. One day as the Mother was going up with a bowl containing four pints of milk, her head reeled and she fell down, thus spilling the milk and spraining her ankle. Stunned by the fall she lay on the ground; then Baburam (Swami Premananda) who happened to be there, lifted her up. The ankle became swollen, making it impossible for her to climb the steps. The Master was pained to hear of the mishap; moreover as he depended on her for many things, he became not a little nervous. But he was always noted for his good humour, so that his anxiety and sympathy found expression in words that made the young devotees forget their sorrow for the time being. He started by saying to Baburam, 'Now that matters have come to such a pass, Baburam, what will turn up next? What about my food? Who will feed me?' The Master was then given rice paste to eat, and the Mother cooked and fed him with it. She wore a big nose-ring (*nath*) at that time. Hence the Master put his hand to his nose and circling a finger round in imitation of the ring, told Baburam with a gesture: 'O Baburam, can you carry in a basket on your head that person who is such and such?' That made Narendra and Baburam laugh until their sides almost split. Three days later, when the swelling on the ankle had subsided a little, the young devotees helped her to limp up the steps; during these three days Golap-Ma, who was brought there for the purpose, prepared the rice paste and fed the Master; for the Master did not accept cooked rice from any non-brahmin.

When the Master was completely bed-ridden at Cossipore, the young devotees on attendance planned one evening to drink the juice collected in an earthen pitcher by tapping a date palm at the southern boundary of the garden. The Master knew nothing of this. At the appointed hour, Niranjan (Swami Niranjanananda) and others proceeded towards the tree in a group. Just then the Mother suddenly noticed the Master darting down like an arrow. Startled at this, she thought, 'Is that possible at all? How can one, who has to be helped even to change sides on his bed, rush down like that?' And yet she could not totally disbelieve her eyes. Accordingly she had to go to his room to be sure of the matter; but he was not there, the room was empty. In great consternation she searched for him here and there, but failing to find him, went to her own room with extreme confusion and apprehension in her mind. After a while she saw him darting up as swiftly as he had gone down. To satisfy her curiosity she asked the Master about it later and he said, 'Did you indeed notice that? The boys who have come here are all young. They were proceeding merrily to drink the juice of a date palm in the garden. I saw that there was a black cobra there which is so ferocious that it would have bitten them all. The boys did not know this. So I went there by a different route to drive it away; and I told it, "Don't enter here again."' He warned her not to divulge this to others. The Mother was overwhelmed by these happenings.

From a minor incident we can have an idea of how respectfully the young devotees looked on the Mother even in those early days. The Master once said to them, 'I have a desire to eat the food you get by begging.' At this Narendra and others leaped with joy. But before they started on their mission they decided that the first person to be approached should be the Holy Mother. And when they begged her, she dropped full sixteen annas,[1] into their begging pot. Thus in every

1. Sixteen annas make one rupee and the full moon is supposed.

undertaking they sought her blessing; and she, too, had the sweetest and kindest of words for them. If the young men became upset at the continuous emaciation of the Master's body, it was she who consoled and encouraged them, and when any problem about the Master's service cropped up, her advice helped them to solve it. In fact, behind everything there were the loving, spoken words, the blissful, unseen hands of the Holy Mother which put life into every heart.

10

SILENT PREPARATION

We have given many illustrations to show how courageously the Mother freed herself from conventions and prejudices when duty or occasion demanded it. Such changes often resulted from the advice of the Master, but quite as often the Mother spontaneously made the necessary adjustments; for the single aim of her life was to please the Master. But these remarks relate only to matters of daily routine. In regard to the higher life, the two souls were so similarly attuned that even independent of each other they produced but the same charming strains; in that field the Mother had no effort to make and the Master had no direction to give. This side of their lives has also been partially depicted. Now we shall relate some incidents not discussed earlier.

A great Vaishnava festival, called the Danda-mahotsava, is held at Panihati on the eastern bank of the Ganges, a few miles above Calcutta, every year in the month of Jyeshtha (May-June). The festival for the year 1885 was near at hand. The Master had taken part in it several times before he had any 'English-educated' devotees at Dakshineswar, but latterly he had not gone there. In 1885 the Master told a group of his devotees, 'The festival will be a mart of divine joy and you will find the Lord's name bandied about freely. You "young Bengal" have never witnessed such a thing. Let us all go along and see this.' Accordingly twenty-five devotees reached Dakshineswar in two hired boats at about nine o'clock on the morning of the festive day. A third boat lay anchored in the stream for the Master. Some women devotees reached earlier in the morning for preparing food and all got ready to start at ten. After the Master had finished his meal, the Mother inquired through a woman devotee, whether she too might join the party. The Master told the devotee, 'If she wants to, she may.' Hearing the Master's words, the Holy Mother said to the devotee, 'Quite a number of persons are

going with him; besides, the place will be filled with people. It will be difficult for me in that great crowd to get down from the boat and see the festival. So I won't go.' The women devotees took leave of her and got into the Master's boat and left for Panihati. When the Master's boat returned from the festival at 8-30 p.m., the women devotees decided to spend the night with the Mother; and then coming to learn that on the ensuing full moon day there would be elaborate worship and much merriment in commemoration of the consecration of the Kali temple, they decided to stay on till then. When the Master sat down for his supper that night, he said to one of the women, 'It was so crowded; moreover, all had their eyes riveted on me because of my divine inebriation; she (Mother) did well not to come with us. If people had seen her by my side, they would have said, "A pair of swans[1] has come!" She is very intelligent.' When the women reported this to the Mother, she said, 'From the way he gave me leave to go in your party in the morning, I knew that it was not a hearty permission. If he had wanted me to go, he would have said, "Yes, surely she can come too." When without doing so he left the decision to me with the remark, "If she wants to, she also may," I decided that I had better give up the idea.'

The Master that night told the women of another instance of her intelligence: 'When the Marwari devotee (Lakshminarayana) proposed to give me ten thousand rupees, I felt as though my head was under a saw. I said to Mother (Kali), "Mother, Mother, dost Thou come to tempt me again after so long a time?" At that time I called her (Holy Mother) to test her mind and said, "Listen, my dear, this man proposes to give me money. As I have refused the offer, he proposes to give it to you. Why don't you accept this?" At this she replied instantaneously, "How

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1. *Hamsa-Hamsi* in Bengali. Hamsa means both swan and soul. The word Parama-hamsa means a great soul, and is applied to the world-renouncing monks like Paramahamsa Ramakrishna. Hence *hamsa-hamsi* means, by a pun, Ramakrishna and his wife.

can that be? The money can't be accepted. If I receive it, it will be as good as your receiving it; for if I take it, I shall spend it on you; and hence it will amount to your own acceptance. People respect you for your renunciation; therefore the money can never be accepted." At these words of hers I felt intensely relieved.'

It was not only in worldly affairs that these two hearts beat in unison, in spiritual matters too the Mother kept in step with the Master. During the Shodashi worship we had a visual demonstration of the essential identity of their outlook. In the Nahabat and in the Shyampukur house we were struck with wonder by a glimpse of the Mother's self-effacement in the service of her husband, exhibiting spiritual discipline of the highest order. Not content with all this, the Mother converted her whole life into a series of austerity in the same way as the Master did. Now, any intense religious pursuit is supernormal, and specially so was it in the case of the Mother. Hence if we study this phase of her life from a mere normal point of view, the reader may well ask: 'What are you about? At the end of the Shodashi worship, the Mother had received as a free gift from the Master all the fruits of his own long spiritual discipline. Her disposition was naturally so sweet and charming, that even if she had had no background of austerity, she could not have failed to impress others; and her physical suffering and strenuous life were in themselves a telling example of great spiritual striving. Is not a life that comprises all these at their best, already established in the highest state that a human being can aspire to? Is it not then unreasonable to say that spiritual progress is dependent on a formal course of discipline as prescribed by the scriptures? What indeed are you aiming at?' But we reply, 'Let us not lose our patience. As impartial biographers, we shall state all the facts in the life of this unique character; it is not our function to judge their worth or interpret their purpose; the readers, both of the present and of future generations,

may attempt that task. But we feel sure that no effort of a divine woman like the Mother is wholly without meaning. Such an effort flows from a fullness of heart rather than from social need or impulsion. Because of this, each of her acts has a natural splendour and a novelty, which though not obvious to modern minds make them worthy of being recorded. Unfortunately most of the incidents of her silent discipline have fallen into oblivion or are only imperfectly known. For instance, the Mother undertook a vow (perhaps on the 20th May, 1883) called the *Savitri-vrata,* which is mentioned in the notes of Swami Saradananda and the memoirs of Master Mahashaya, but of which we know nothing apart from these casual references. Yet such hints are invaluable in reconstructing our picture of that unknown side of the Mother's life.'

A living touch with spirituality comes through association with those who actually tread the path. The Mother lived virtually in the centre of a spiritual concourse at Dakshineswar, and the lessons she imbibed were many. Not to mention the hundreds of ardent and advanced devotees who gathered round the Master, there was a constant stream of adepts and aspirants, both men and women, who stopped at Dakshineswar on their way to Gangasagar and Puri. About most of these we know next to nothing. And about the other well-known personalities who have been dealt with more fully in other books, we may keep silent. We have referred to the Bhairavi Brahmani, one chapter of whose life became closely linked with that of the Mother. There is mention of another Bhairavi[1] too. One day the Master said to the Mother, 'A Bhairavi will come today. Get a piece of cloth suitably dyed; we shall give it to her.' That Bhairavi came that day after the worship at the Kali temple was over, and entered into a long conversation with the Master.

1. Bhairava is an aspect of Siva. In dress and outer appearance he is terrible; but he is also a protector of the supplicant. Bhairavas and Bhairavis are mendicants who follow his cult.

She then stayed on at Dakshineswar for some days. She was somewhat hot-tempered. She not only took on herself the duty of protecting the Mother, but also warned her, 'Do thou keep ready for me some rice soaked in water overnight; if thou dost not, I shall leave thee dead here by piercing thee with my trident.' The Mother was terrified at this; but the Master said, 'Don't you be afraid. She is a real Bhairavi and hence her temper is a little high!' On some days the Bhairavi obtained so much by begging that it lasted her for a week or more. The chief officer of the temple said to her, 'Mother, why should you go out for begging? You can get it all here.' The Bhairavi replied, 'You are my uncle Kalanemi[1]! How can one depend on your words?'

When the Mother and Lakshmi Devi lived together at the Nahabat, the Master on his way to the northern *jhau* grove in the small hours of the night would wake them up saying, 'Get up, O Lakshmi, get up. Awaken your aunt. How much longer will you sleep? It's nearly morning now. Wash your face with Ganges water and call on the Mother (Kali); begin your *japa* and meditation.' If the Mother and Lakshmi Devi were already awake, they would leave their beds at once. But in winter, even though the Master called, the Holy Mother, with a view perhaps to ensuring a longer period of sleep for Lakshmi Devi, would say in an undertone, 'Do you keep silent! His eyes are sleepless. It's not as yet time to get up; the birds aren't chirping as yet. Don't you respond!' If the Master got no response or had reason to think that they did not wake up, he would, out of fun, pour water over the door-sill; and they jumped up for fear of the beds on the floor getting wet; sometimes their beds did thus get actually wet. As a result of this, Lakshmi Devi became an early riser. The Mother, of course, was always an early riser.

One day the Master wanted to test the Mother's capacity to appreciate his deep spiritual moods. That day he

1. Maternal uncle of Ravana.

asked Mother to prepare betel rolls, tidy up his bed, and sweep the floor; and then he proceeded to the Kali temple to prostrate himself before the goddess. The Holy Mother had nearly finished her work when the Master entered the room unnoticed, with red eyes, staggering gait, and fuddled speech like those of a man in a state of intoxication. The Mother was so engrossed in her work that she did not notice him even though he came within reach. Then he suddenly pushed her from behind and said, 'Hullo, my dear, have I drunk wine!' Though the Mother was taken aback by this unexpected sight, she promptly replied, 'No, no, why should you be under wine?' 'Why do I then wobble?' argued the Master. 'Why am I fuddled in speech? Am I tipsy?' In haste the Mother replied, 'No, no, why should you have drunk wine? You have drunk of the nectar of Mother Kali's love?' Highly delighted, the Master said, 'You have spoken rightly indeed!'

Sometimes the Master imparted to her high spiritual truths. Once after relating the life of Sri Krishna to the Mother and Lakshmi Devi, he said to the latter, 'You both should discuss between yourselves what you have heard from me. What the cattle eat in the day, they chew over again at night. If you and your aunt discuss these incidents in Krishna's life, you will not forget them. You will remember them well.' Another day he drew for the Holy Mother on paper a diagram of the six plexuses[1] to illustrate the lessons he was giving her on yoga.

The Master knew that the Mother loved his *kirtana*; and accordingly, before the music began he asked his nephew Ramlal to keep open the northern door of his room, saying, 'Should they not witness the divine afflatus and spiritual moods that will find expression here? Should

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1. Much later, when the Mother was asked about it, she replied quite innocently, 'Ah, my dear, could I imagine that events would take such a big turn! That thing was mislaid and I couldn't trace it.' We must remember that during the Master's illness and after, the Mother was in such great trouble that she could not take care of her personal belongings.

they not hear (the *kirtana*)? How will they learn else?' They watched through a hole in the screen of plaited bamboo strips. As this hole gradually became bigger, the Master noticed it and remarked humorously, 'Hullo Ramlal, your aunt's screen there has got a split, it seems.' Unable to appreciate the Master's joke, Ramlal replied that the Master alone was to blame for that unwelcome development; for while Ramlal wanted to keep the northern door closed, the Master directed otherwise.

The Mother once learnt an occult formula for curing certain diseases. The Master coming to know of this, asked her to surrender it at the feet of her chosen deity, so that her spiritual life might be absolutely pure. She related the incident to Yogin-Ma when the latter got into an imbroglio, in the Master's presence, on that very score. It was like this. One day, when the Master had rinsed his mouth with the water poured by Yogin-Ma on his palm, he suddenly turned to her and said, 'Hullo, my dear, I have a pain in my throat. Please utter the *mantra* that you know for its cure and pass your hand over the affected part.' Yogin-Ma did as the Master directed. Then she came to the Mother and said, 'How did he know that I had this formula?' At this the Mother replied with a smile, 'Well, dear, he knows everything, and yet he does not hate any one for what one does with sincerity of purpose. You need not have any fear. I too learnt that *mantra* before I came to him. When I told him of it after coming here, he said, "There's no harm in it. Now you lay it down at the feet of your chosen deity."'

He looked after the Mother with very great care. About this the Mother herself said, 'When I was at the Nahabat, the Master forbade even Ramlal to meet me though he was my nephew.' One morning at nine o'clock, Hriday went to the Nahabat to give the Mother and Lakshmi Devi the fruits and sweets offered in the temples, and spent some time in talking and laughing aloud with them. After his return, the Master reproached him saying

'You shall return soon after handing over such things. I warn you not to tarry any longer in future.' [1]

In addition to this kind of direct training, instruction, and preservation of a suitable atmosphere for her inner unfolding he also encouraged her in all her voluntary endeavours. The Mother could sing well. One night she and Lakshmi Devi, while singing in a low tone a religious song of a high spiritual order, became absorbed in its soul-enthralling appeal. The Master heard them and told the Mother the next day, 'You were much enraptured by that song yesterday. Well, that was very fine!' Another afternoon the Mother collected some jasmine and red *rangan* (*ixora coccinea* or purviflora) buds with which she strung a fine stout garland and then put it in a bowl of water for the petals to open out. Then she sent it for being put round Kali's neck, which was done soon after the Master arrived at the temple, and he was so charmed by the beauty that he kept on repeating: 'Ah! How fine it looks against the black colour (of Kali)!' When on inquiry he learnt that it was strung by the Holy Mother, he said, 'Ah! Have her brought here once. Let her see how beautiful the Mother (Kali) looks with this garland on.' Coming there with the maid-servant Brinde, she found Balaram Babu, Surendra Babu and others going to the temple. So through her shyness she hid herself behind the hem of the maid-servant's garment and proceeded to climb to the high basement of the temple by the steps at the rear. At this the Master called out, 'Don't you climb up that

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1. Bengali society, in those days, did not allow high-born women to leave the inner apartments or talk and sing loudly. That was a matter of propriety and family honour. The Master was here showing his respect for the local custom. Similarly, when at Kamarpukur a big hole wide as a window was made in the bedroom wall, he ordered it be closed at once, since it opened on the public road behind. But the same Master asked the Holy Mother to walk from Dakshineswar to Calcutta to see the ailing wife of Balaram Babu; and at another time sent two ladies to the market place to buy some vegetables. Besides, he arranged for the Mother's literary education. He came to fulfil and not to destroy.

side, my dear. The other day a fisherwoman slipped down, when going up that side and died. Why don't you come up by the front steps?' Hearing this, Balaram Babu and others moved away, and the Mother had a hearty look at Kali from the front door.

The Holy Mother and Lakshmi Devi received the sacred *mantra*[1] of Sakti[2] from an up-country sannyasin named Purnananda, who was stout, fine in appearance, and quiet in temperament, and who happened to be then at Kamarpukur. Later on, when the Mother was at Dakshineswar, the Master wrote something on her tongue, which process is a well-known form of higher initiation. Next day the Mother said to Lakshmi Devi, 'He wrote on my tongue yesterday. Why don't you also approach him?' Some time thereafter the Master wrote on Lakshmi Devi's tongue the secret letter (*Bija*, lit., seed) of Radha and Krishna, and even though he was told that Lakshmi had previously got the Sakti *mantra*, he said, 'Let that be so; I have given her the true *mantra*.'

The Mother left her bed every morning at three o'clock and sat in meditation facing south on the western verandah of the Nahabat. This was almost a rule with her. But one night she felt a little out of sorts and was late in getting up; and this lethargy continued for some days, nay, the time of leaving the bed began to be further put off, till the Mother realized that if one means to do a thing properly, one must have intense earnestness and must apply oneself heart and soul to it. And so she never faltered

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1. A *mantra* for *japa* consists of two parts, the seed (*Bija*) or the special secret letter of the particular deity and a very small prayer or salutation in Sanskirt to the deity concerned. The initiated disciple goes on repeating this *mantra* at stated hours of the day. The number of repetitions varies according to circumstances, but a thousand or two thousand repetitions are quite common.

2. Literally means power, God conceived as an expression of energy, in all planes of existence—physical, vital, mental, moral and spiritual. Kali and others are particular manifestations of this Sakti.

again. The number of times she made *japa* of her *mantra* was very great. One day she told her niece Nalini in the course of a talk, 'What a lot of a work I did when I was of your age! And yet, in spite of all that work, I repeated my *mantra* a hundred thousand times.' Along with such meditation and *japa*, there went on in her mind a constant prayer. When the moon appeared in the sky at night and was reflected on the placid waters of the Ganges, she prayed to God with wet eyes, 'Even the moon has its spots—may my mind have no spot at all.'

Through the practice of meditation, her mind, which was naturally turned inward, became fully concentrated even in those early days. She herself said, 'One has to be up and doing; can anything be achieved without diligence? One should find some time even in the midst of domestic duties. What to speak of myself, my child! I used to begin my *japa* in those days at Dakshineswar after leaving the bed at three in the morning, and lose all consciousness. One night, when all was absolutely calm around, I sat for *japa* near the steps of the Nahabat. I did not know at all when the Master went to the tamarisk grove (as he used to do every night at that time). On other nights I used to hear the sound of his slippers. I was deep in meditation. My appearance was not like this then[1]—I had ornaments and a cloth with a red border. The end of the cloth covering the upper part of my body was being blown down; still I was not conscious of it. Boy Yogen (Swami Yogananda), who came with a waterpot for the Master, found me in that state. My daughter, what fine days those were! On moonlit nights I looked up at the moon and prayed with folded hands "Make my heart as white as your rays!" Ah! What a mind I had then! The maid-servant, Brinde, one day (pushed and) set rolling a plate of bell-metal before me, the sound of which seemed to pierce my heart.' The Mother's mind was

1. She said on another occasion, 'Do you think my complexion was like this before? I was very beautiful at one time. At first I was not very stout; then (after the Master's passing away) I became so.'

then so deeply concentrated that the jarring sound shocked her like a thunder peal.

As her own mind began to be more concentrated through meditation and *japa* and as she noticed the deepening of the spiritual emotions in others, the desire grew in her to have something of their inebriation. Particularly was she impressed by the devotional fervour and emotional outbursts in the life of Gauri-Ma. So she conveyed her request for this to the Master through Lakshmi Devi. But the Master dismissed the idea saying, 'She (Gauri-Ma) is a girl of Kalighat; she can withstand all that.[1] Women, who are naturally mild and weak, prosper and succeed through softness. Women should be meek and sober; modesty is their forte; otherwise there will be public calumny.'

The Mother often had her moods of rapt absorption, but we do not know whether along with that self-forgetfulness there was any external expression known to herself or others. It would seem, however, that even if there was such a manifestation, she was not aware of it or it was not as overflowing as Gauri-Ma's. Perhaps such exuberance of spiritual ecstasy was kept in check because of the Master's condemnation of it. But for one who would in future become the consoler, guide, and inspirer of many in her aspects of mother, teacher and divinity, there was need for manifestation, though in a secret recess, of that higher type of emotion through which alone common men can measure spiritual heights. So that the desire was not suppressed for ever in the Mother's heart, but it cropped up again; and God, too, it seems, realized that the time was opportune for revealing her spiritual power for the fulfilment of her life's mission; and therefore it is that we find the Mother commissioning Yogin-Ma again with these words: 'Pray to him, so that I have a little of spiritual ecstasy. I don't get the

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1. Kalighat is the quarter where the well-known Kali temple in south Calcutta stands. Pilgrims visit the place in large numbers, and many girls of the priestly families become extrovert by frequent contacts with such strangers and by being worshipped by them as emblems of Sakti.

opportunity of telling him, because he is always surrounded by people.' Yogin-Ma, in her innocence, took these words at their face value; she could not imagine that no mediator was really necessary for giving concrete shape on the physical plane to the strong, though unseen, spiritual line of communication that subsisted between these two souls; nor could she realize that even from her childhood the Mother's mind was so high-strung that, though others might be unaware, she was ever in the presence of the Lord. Yogin-Ma simply thought, 'It may be so, since the Mother wants this, I shall tell the Master.' Next morning she found the Master sitting alone on his cot and broached the subject. The Master heard her but kept silent. As no one dared talk to him when he was in such a mood, Yogin-Ma prostrated herself before him again and left the room silently.

When she returned, the Mother was engaged in her daily worship, and the door was ajar. Through the opening she noticed the Mother laughing—laughing and then again weeping by turns—while tears flowed down profusely. After passing a while in this way she became quite silent, merged in *samadhi*. Yogin-Ma, then shut the door and walked away. When she returned there after some time, the Mother asked her, 'Are you just come (from the Master)?' Yogin-Ma now got an opportunity for twitting the Mother for sending her on a useless errand and said, 'How so, Mother? Didn't you say you didn't have spiritual ecstasies?' The Mother smiled bashfully to cover up the exposure.

At times Yogin-Ma spent a night with the Mother. She preferred to have a separate bed; but the Mother drew her to herself, so that they both shared the same bed. One night somebody was playing on a flute. The Mother was in the grip of a spiritual mood produced by that music, and she sat up and began laughing by fits and starts. Yogin-Ma, too, sat up and withdrew herself to one corner of the bed thinking, 'I am a householder; I should not touch her now.' The Mother came round after a long time.

II

ON THE COMMISSION

Gradually it became clear after the Mother's arrival at Dakshineswar that the Master, by imparting transcendental as well as secular wisdom, by deepening her life of divine aspiration, and awakening her dormant power of spiritual ministration, was preparing her for taking up and fulfilling the mission that had just commenced in his own life. We have read of the invocation of the deity at the Shodashi worship, when the Mother received the adoration of the great awakened soul and became conscious of her own divinity, though she did not even then decide whether or not to take up what was to be her life's work. Moreover, that worship took place at dead of night in a closed room. The people probably heard of this long afterwards, but they could not grasp its full import. Now came the time for a clearer call to the Mother to enter into her own domain and to bear witness before the devotees as to her real stature. And hence we find that during the closing years of the Master's life, his work in this field followed a well-defined course. He had been trying to arouse her sub-conscious potentiality through veneration, adoration, and direct references to her divinity. He had been equipping her mind for her future task of guiding spiritual aspirants by teaching her various powerful *mantras*, pulsating with the life he had breathed into them through his own experiments with them, and telling her of the levels of life for which each *mantra* was suitable. And he had been creating a field for the expression of her motherhood and vivifying it by introducing his devotees to her and telling her how to deal with them. And as a last step he invited her off and on, in no uncertain terms, to co-operate in the task willingly and at the same time he apprised the devotees of the course of future development. We shall now proceed to a study of these events.

Before we do so, however, we must be careful about one thing; we must not commit the blunder of thinking that the Holy Mother's present-day glory is entirely due to the Master's training and endeavour. It is a basic truth of the art of teaching that unless a student has some latent powers of a very special or high order, the best teacher and the most valuable instruction cannot make him surpass the ordinary run of mankind. And along with those powers is necessary the willing and eager co-operation of the taught. But the Mother was willing even in those early Dakshineswar days to make the Master's effort a success, just as the Master, fully cognizant of her essential divinity, was extremely eager to make her begin her mission.

The Master one day told Golap-Ma, 'She (Mother) is Sarada, Saraswati[1]; she has come to impart knowledge. She has descended by covering up her beauty this time, lest unregenerate people should come to grief by looking at her with impure eyes.' On another occasion he said, 'She is the communicator of knowledge, she is full of the rarest wisdom. Is she of the common run? She is my Sakti (power).' And to his nephew Hriday, he said, 'My dear, her name is Sarada, she is Saraswati. That's why she likes to put on ornaments.' The reader may have in mind that when the Holy Mother came to her father-in-law's house as a child and began crying at the sight of her person denuded of ornaments, Chandramani Devi, mother of Sri Ramakrishna, placed her on her lap and consoled her saying that Ramakrishna would adorn her afterwards. The Master had that scene ever before his eyes, and accordingly told Hriday, 'Just see how much money you have in your safe. Have a pair of gold armlets made for her.' The Master was then ill; still he ordered those armlets to be made at a cost of three hundred rupees. But the actual

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1. Sarada means Saraswati, the mythological goddess of Learning; and etymologically Sarada means 'the giver of sara or essence', *i.e.*, knowledge of Brahman.

cost came up to two hundred rupees only, and so the balance was paid to the Mother in cash. When the Master had been going through his austerity in the early days, he had a vision of Sita at Panchavati when he noticed that her bracelets had diamonds cut on their surface; hence he had such bracelets too, made for the Mother[1]; and then he humorously remarked, "That's my relationship with her.'

It was not easy to recognize the Mother, behind her rural simplicity, lack of modern culture, and absence of pelf and power. Sri Ramakrishna himself knew that the modern world, rolling in wealth and steeped in enjoyment, could not easily appreciate a character that was made up of the purest material and had nothing of the flash and flourish which appeal to a modern mind; and hence he spoke about the Mother in fun, 'She is a cat under ashes.' As the true colour of a cat covered with ashes escapes the notice of a careless observer, so also does the true stature of the Holy Mother elude the ken of ordinary men. Swami Premananda wrote about her in a letter: 'Who has understood the Holy Mother? There's not a trace of grandeur. The Master had at least his power of *vidya* (knowledge) manifested, but the Mother?—her prefection of knowledge is hidden. What a mighty power is this! Glory to the Mother! Glory to the Mother! Glory to the powerful Mother! A poison that we can't assimilate we pass on to the Mother. She draws everyone to her lap. An infinite power—an incomparable grace! Glory to the Mother! Not to speak of us; we haven't seen the Master himself doing this. With how much caution and what testing he accepted any one! And here—what do you see here at

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1. Yogin-Ma says, 'At that time the Mother lived at the Nahabat like the most revered Sita. She wore a piece of cloth with broad red borders, and vermilion at the parting of ther hair. Her thick black tresses almost touched her knees. She wore a gold necklace, a big nose-ring, ear-rings, and bracelets, those which Mathur Babu gave the Master when he took to spiritual practice by assuming the role of a handmaid to the Divine Mother.'

the Mother's place? Wonderful! Wonderful! She grants shelter to everyone, eats food from the hands of almost any one, and all is digested! Mother, Mother, victory unto the Mother!' And the world-renowned Swami Vivekananda wrote: 'Brother, I shall demonstrate the worship of the living Durga, and then shall my name be true..Brother, I tell you, I am a fanatic in this matter. Of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, you may assert that he was God, man, or whatever you like; but fie on him who is not devoted to the Mother.' When we read such invaluable appreciations, our pen suddenly stops and in bewilderment we ask ourselves, 'Are we not engaged in a task entirely beyond us?' And yet once we are in it, we have to proceed with the Mother's grace as our only strength.

Before proclaiming the divinity of the Holy Mother at Dakshineswar, the Master hinted at it at Kamarpukur, though the uneducated and uncultured village women did not, perhaps, comprehend her greatness. The Mother was then a mere girl of fourteen. When the Master talked to the village women of higher things, the Mother often fell asleep. The others then tried to wake her up and siad, 'What a pity; she misses these fine things! She has fallen asleep!' But the Master said, 'No, my dear, no; don't awaken her. Don't think she is asleep without reason. If she hears these things, she will fly headlong away.' The women later reported this to the Mother. The Master alone knew what he exactly meant by those words. Probably, he wanted to convey the idea that the Mother's mind had such an innate repugnance for this world and was ever so attracted towards transcendental verities, that if she became engulfed in such high thoughts before an adequate environment was ready for the divine part she was destined to play, the very purpose of her birth in this world of ours would be frustrated.

Howsoever that might have been, this much will suffice for the present as an introduction to the comprehension of her divinity. As we proceed further in the

delineation of this unique personality we shall find that though her character evolved wonderfully amidst strange surroundings, it reached perfection in one particular field. Though she was divine, the world has seen in her an all-loving Mother. This is a very important phenomenon in human history. In the *Srirama-purva-tapani Upanishad* (verse 7) it is said, 'For fulfilling the purpose of the aspirants, the formless Brahman assumes forms.' In the *Gita* (IV.11) Sri Krishna declares, 'In whatsoever way men approach me, even so I reward them.' And in the *Chandi* (XII.35) the Rishi (Seer) says, 'O King, that Divine Mother, though birthless, yet manifests Herself again and again for the protection of the world.' And hence from time immemorial men, particularly Indians, have been worshipping Her in diverse symbols and images. Her hymns and songs too, are innumerable. She is with us under various guises and in multifarious forms. She bestows wealth and wisdom. She removes ailments and grants health, and She affords us protection and kills our enemies. When pleased, She grants faith, devotion, and even emancipation; but when offended She liquidates the sin and the sinner. We have been adoring Her from time of yore in Her aspects as women, as sources of inspiration, as divinity, or as mothers. Drawn by the devotion of mortals She comes down now and again. We meet Her in the person of a Sati, Sita, Radha, or Andal[1]. A pathetic cry from a helpless child like the poet-mystic Ramprasad makes Her leave the heavenly throne and come down as a small girl to help the devotee in mending his dilapidated fence. In the forms of daughters and mothers She consoles Her devotees in their trials and tribulations. Men have thus established the sweetest of relationships with the Transcendental Entity. And yet the Devi still remained

1. Sati and Sita were consorts of Siva and Ramachandra respectively; and both of them were noted for their unparalleled devotion to their husbands, Bhu-devi, consort of Vishnu incarnated in South India as Andal (or Kodai), illustrating the *madhur bhava* (looking upon God as one's nayaka or husband).

in Her lofty aloofness as ever. In spite of brief appearances for granting the desires of particular devotees, or Her descent with the Lord as Sita or Radha, She did not incarnate fully as the Universal Mother for bringing about a world regeneration through Her personal endeavour. In the life of the Holy Mother we arrive at the culmination of this line of descent. The deity here is fully recognized as a living human personality receiving the worship of Sri Ramakrishna and being identified by him with Mother Kali in the temple and his mother Chandramani Devi in the Nahabat.

Why did man want the Devi in this particular form and why did She grant the prayer? We have stated that unless the Devi incarnated as the Mother, there would ever have remained a gap in the spiritual world. Man comprehends higher and newer truths in terms of what he already knows. The mother holds the child in her womb and suckles it after its birth. On opening the eyes, the child finds the mother as a sure and the most unique source of all affection, nourishment, happiness, beauty and security. In the field of spiritual striving, too, the aspirant wants to visualize the Deity as the embodiment par excellence of all those fine human relationships. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'The attitude of looking on God as Mother is the highest form of spiritual discipline.' Swami Vivekananda eulogizes motherly love thus: 'The position of the mother is the highest in the world, as it is the one place in which to learn and exercise the greatest unselfishness. The love of God is the only love that is higher than a mother's love; all other love is lower.' (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Edn. VIII, Vol. I, p. 66.) If it is the aim of the aspirant to merge the sense of 'I and mine' in the universal ego of the Deity, and to taste the bliss of consciousness through unquestioning dependence and refuge in that one reality, then in the motherhood of the Deity lies the guarantee for such a consummation. Through the different attitudes of quietude, service, and sonship to God, we do of course get

an increasingly greater degree of intimacy with Him; but the absolute self-absorption of the unquestioning child, perhaps, transcends even this.

And the aspirant wants that the Lord should, through His mercy, forgive all his weakness and inability and draw him to His lap with the fullest affection; he wants to be assured of his future by visualizing in the face of his Deity this dear and dependable smile of affection. From childhood he is used to this kind of assurance; why should he be deprived of this in the field of spiritual advance? The selfless *guru*, out of his compassion, imparts to the disciple the knowledge of higher things, whereby he can withdraw his mind from the enjoyment of worldly things. The infinitely glorious Deity, endowed with the best of all qualities and transcending the lapses and limitations of life, holds before the aspirant an unsurpassable ideal whereby he is inspired and energized to attain that state. The ever-loving and ever-smiling Mother melts the heart of the child with a touch of affection, wipes away from his mind all traces of past failures and dejection, and exerts an irresistible pull whereby he gets dissolved in an ocean of bliss and freedom from cares. Furthermore, in this transparently pure attitude of the aspirant, there is no room for any bad thought; and there is no touch of selfishness and meaningless emotionalism. This figure of the Mother, shining in Her self-collected poise and compassion is absolutely without a parallel. The aspirant, sitting fearlessly in Her lap or holding on to Her apron, can easily get across this wilderness of the world. God's incarnation as Mother was necessary for fulfilling these needs. And above all, it was necessary for the Deity to come down as the Holy Mother, so that the present sensuous and materially-minded world might be raised to a higher state of aspiration and experience. Humanity is, therefore, fortunate today in having this living and life-transforming Motherhood in a concrete form and in intimate touch with all the ramifications of life.

The Master was aware of this significance of the Mother's life and he apprised her of this. Subsequently, when an inquisitive disciple of the Mother asked her, 'Mother, other incarnations survivied their Saktis (consorts)[1]; but why did the Master precede you this time?' The Mother said in reply, 'My boy, you must be aware that the Master looked upon all in the world as Mother. He left me behind for demonstrating that motherhood to the world.' On another occasion she said, 'When the Master departed, I too felt like going away. But he appeared and said, "No, you stay on; there's much still to be done." In truth, I find at long last that there's much to do.'

One day at Cossipore the Mother noticed the Master looking at her for a long time, as though wishing to say something. And she said at last, 'Why don't you speak out what you wish to?' The Master said in an aggrieved tone, 'Well, my dear, won't you do anything? Should this (pointing to his own body) do everything single-handed?' The Mother, conscious of her helplessness, said, 'I am a woman. What can I do?' The Master at once corrected her, 'No, no, you'll have to do a lot.' When the Mother slipped down from the stairs at Cossipore, thereby spraining her ankle, she took rest barely for three days out of sheer necessity, and then, impelled by an extreme desire for service, she went up the Master's room with his food. Finding the Master reclining with his eyes closed, she said, 'It's time for your diet; get up.' The Master seemed to have returned from some far-off land and while still in that mood of aloofness, he said, 'See, the people of Calcutta appear to be crawling about like worms in the dark. Do look after them.' The Mother pleaded, 'I am a woman. How can that be?' The Master pointed towards his body and continued in the same strain, 'What after all has this one

1. This is not strictly correct. The questioner perhaps meant that the Saktis of the incarnations did nothing tangible after the incarnations had passed away.

done? You'll have to do much more.' The Mother wanted to change the topic and said with some emphasis, 'That will take its own time. Do take your food now.' Then the Master sat up.

Even before this, the Master used to sing:

> To whom to explain the difficulty
> I courted by coming here?
> The wearer best knows where the shoe pinches
> How can others know?
> A maid am I in a foreign land
> Where I blush to show my face.
> I can't state, can't explain
> What a handicap it's to be a woman.

And at the same time he told the Mother, 'Is this my trouble alone? It's yours too.'

The Master did not rest content with reminding her of her real nature and inviting her openly to shoulder the responsibility; he also presented his devotees to her and thus created a field for the expression of her latent motherhood. At the time of sending young Sarada (Swami Trigunatitananda) to the Mother for initiation he quoted a Bengali couplet to put faith in him:

> Infinite is the maya of Radha which defies definition—
> A million Krishnas and a million Ramas have birth, and
> live, and die.

The Mother did not certainly initiate Sarada on that day, for she herself declared Swami Yogananda to be her first disciple, and his initiation took place at Vrindaban years after this. But Sarada's brother, Sri Ashutosh Mitra, maintains that the Mother initiated him. Perhaps, the Mother gave him as well a *mantra* after she had done so to Yogananda. Be that as it may, for the present we are not studying the Mother's reaction, but rather the Master's efforts at inducing her to active ministration.

With the growth of the Master's circle of devotees the Mother's domestic duties in the form of cooking, preparing betel rolls, etc., began to grow apace. Just then Latu had come to Dakshineswar to live with the Master.

At first he spent most of the day sitting at Panchavati and other places made holy by the Master's austerity. One day when the Master was proceeding to the tamarisk grove he noticed the Mother kneading the dough and a little further on he saw Latu in his meditation. He at once called the young man and said by way of correcting his mood, 'Hullo Latu, you are sitting here, and she over there can't get any one to make bread out of the dough!' Then he conducted Latu to the Nahabat and said, 'This boy is very pure of heart. When you have need of anything tell this boy; he will do it for you.' From that day Latu became a member of the Mother's family.

When Rakhal, the spiritual child of the Master, came to Dakshineswar, the Master introduced him to the Mother; and when Rakhal's wife came, he sent her to the Mother with the instruction, 'Let her (Mother) see her daughter-in-law's face after giving her a rupee.'[1] At the Master's direction Gopal-dada did all the marketing for the Mother and Yogin helped her in various other ways. When Purna, as a boy, began frequenting Dakshineswar, the Mother was one day asked to feed him. As desired by the Master she dressed the boy with garland and sandal paste and then sat by him to feed him most affectionately with the various dishes she had cooked for him. After the meal she poured water on his palms for washing his mouth. All this time the Master kept on pacing the small distance between the Nahabat and his room. He approached the Mother and gave some instruction as to how Purna was to be treated, then he walked away; but before he had gone far, some fresh idea occurred to him and he retraced his steps to communicate it to the Mother. Thus it went on till the end. As for the Mother, it seems that through this endearing contact with Purna, she had not only her motherly love partially satisfied, but she also learnt how to worship a boy as Narayana.

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1. It is an old Hindu custom.

The Master always took pains to establish abidingly sweet relationships among the devotees and the Mother. When his devotee Balaram Babu's wife fell seriously ill, the Master told the Mother, 'Go, visit her.' The Mother was used to long walks and a distance of about five miles from the Kali temple to Balaram's house was not at all too long for her to cover on foot. But then, part of the way lay through the thickly populated city, and the Mother's sense of propriety told her that it would not be commendable for the Master's wife to be seen walking in the streets of Calcutta; and hence she said, 'How am I to go? There's no conveyance.' The Master replied, 'What! You won't go when my Balaram's family is facing disaster? You will walk; go on foot.' But the Mother had not to walk; for a palanquin was hired and she went in it to the devotee's house. It may be added in passing that during her stay at Shyampukur she visited Balaram's ailing wife once again on foot, and that of her own accord.

There is a funny incident suggestive of the Master's witty way of getting his own ideas expressed and executed through the medium of other people. Gauri-Ma was then a constant visitor to Dakshineswar, and she sometimes spent the night with the Mother at the Nahabat. One day the Master went there and asked her in the Mother's presence, 'Tell me, Gaur-dasi (Gauri-Ma), whom do you love more, me or her.' That sprightly lady avoided a direct answer and with a view to adding to the gaiety of the situation, sang in a sweet voice:

> You aren't greater than Radha (your sweetheart), O Fluteplayer (Krishna),
> People in danger call on You as Madhusudana;
> But when it's Your turn to cry, You make Your flute call,
> 'O thou Radha, thou young maid.'

The meaning of the song was very clear. The Mother pressed Gauri-Ma's hand in sheer shame, and the Master left smiling in utter discomfiture.

We get another illustration of a similar nature from the *Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (pp. 353–355). One day Sri Kalipada Ghosh's wife came to the Master with a sorrowful face and a heart full of distress to tell her tale of woe. Her husband had fallen into bad company and was bringing ruin on the whole family; if the Master could prescribe some remedy, she would be saved from a life of torment. Kali Babu had not visited the Master up till then; and the people of Calcutta had not as yet come to recognize in the Master a prophet of the highest spiritual order who was absolutely free from any show of supernatural powers. Not knowing much of this unsullied saintliness, the lady wanted some kind of charm from him. This was galling to the Master, but for some reason best known to him—it might have been through sheer fun, or real pity for the lady or some inscrutable design—he did not dismiss her outright, but advised her to go to the Nahabat saying, 'There's a woman there. Tell her everything without reserve, and she will give you the real remedy. She knows such *mantras* and charms, and in this matter her power is greater than mine.' The Holy Mother was then at worship with her mind soaring in a domain of extreme compassion. She heard the woman with full sympathy, but did not do anything forthwith; for it appeared to her that the Master was only having a little fun. And yet unwilling to disappoint such a distressed soul, she said, 'What, after all, can I know, my child? In truth, he knows the charm; do go to him.' Finding the woman returning, the Master, perhaps concluded that the fun had worked; accordingly, to add more zest to it, he sent her again to the Nahabat. When the lady had thus been tossed between the Master and Mother thrice, the Mother took pity on her. She did not want to reduce the whole affair to a merry joke, thus adding insult to injury. Accordingly, she consoled her and taking a *bel* leaf out of the offerings made to the deity, handed it over to her saying, 'Take this with you, my child; this will fulfil your desire.' The lady received the leaf

with the greatest reverence and took leave of the Mother. In due course Kalipada Ghosh's mind took a turn for the better, and by stages he became one of the staunch followers of the Master. Through this small incident the Master made the Mother open out her heart in practical benevolence.

Thus as days rolled on, the Mother was becoming consciously or unconsciously more and more intimately associated with the Master's mission of spiritual regeneration, though the mode of expression of her infinite power was naturally orientated by her predominant mood of motherliness.

A yearning for children is deep-rooted in the hearts of women. In most cases, motherhood centres on one's own children, thus making it indistinguishable from selfishness. In some cases other children, too, are associated with one's own, when motherly love takes the form of philanthropy. Sometimes, though rarely, this affection transcends physical relationships and expands over the whole of creation, thereby rendering divine the life of the mother. Even more rarely it comes down in the form of spiritual inspiration in the life of a godly woman who remains absolutely untouched by the world, and whose words and acts open up all closed hearts and lead them Godward. But the motherhood with which we stand face to face in the life of Sri Sarada Devi is of a higher order, being coextensive with Divine love, and hence truly unique and incomparable. And yet from a rational point of view there is a gradation in its manifestation; and a rational comprehension presupposes an analytical study of it in stages. But while we try to grasp its working on any particular level, we must not lose sight of the basic unity running through this life as a whole, in the light of which alone these stages have to be traversed.

When and how was this pure and selfless yearning for divine motherhood first kindled in the recesses of the Mother's heart? Perhaps she had it in her to the fullest

extent even before she was aware of it. This is the natural psychological process. As a matter of fact, we noticed that in her girlhood she attended on her younger brothers, and helped to cool by fanning the food served to famished people. Events of a similar nature have forced themselves on our attention when studying her relations with the devotees at Dakshineswar. But here we are thinking more of the conscious rise of that sentiment and its operation, rather than its hidden working.

She heard her sympathetic friends condemning all childless women as unfortunate and inauspicious. Her mother too, lamented at times thus: 'To what a mad son-in-law have I married my daughter! Alas, she has no family life, no child, and does not hear any one calling her "mother".' The Master one day heard this and said, 'Dear mother-in-law, you need have no disappointment on that score. Your daughter will have so many children, you will see in the long run, that the distressing call of "mother" will make her bewildered.'

The Master's prophecy apart, the Mother herself related how by constantly listening to others, the craving for children woke up in her heart: 'I heard, ever and anon, both here and at Kamarpukur, that a woman, unless she has become a mother is not fit for any (auspicious) work. A barren woman cannot take part in any auspicious work. I was very young then. These words set me thinking sorrowfully, "Of a truth, should even a single son be denied me?" When I went to Dakshineswar, the question once arose in my mind. When I first had the thought, I did not tell anybody; but the Master said spontaneously, "Why do you worry? I shall leave you such jewels of children as one can hardly get even if one performs the severest of austerity, to the extent of cutting off one's head. You will find in the end so many children calling you 'mother', that you will be unable to manage them all." "

Women have been cherishing this desire for children in their hearts from time immemorial. True it is that the

Mother had some taste of this motherhood even during the lifetime of the Master; but that did not satisfy her infinite yearning. The Mother herself has spoken of her feeling of disappointment: 'When the Master departed, I thought in solitude—I was then at Kamarpukur—"I've no son and nothing else; what will be my lot?" One day the Master appeared and said, "Why do you worry? You want one son—I have left for you all these jewels of sons. In time many will call you mother."' The Master talked of things lying in the womb of futurity. But at present we are studying how far this longing of the Mother and this assurance of the Master bore fruit when the latter was still in the world.

The Mother treated the young devotees at Dakshineswar as her own children and felt a strong affection for them. When the need arose, she could protect them more tenderly than even a mother could or did. A crazy woman used to come to the Master at Dakshineswar. At first all took her to be merely insane and so treated her kindly. Afterwards it turned out that she belonged to that class of spiritual aspirants who consider God as their sweetheart. As she identified Sri Ramakrishna with God, she mentally developed that peculiar attitude towards him. As contrasted with this, the Master regarded all women as veritable manifestations of the Universal Mother. Without considering seriously the consequences of such a contradiction, the crazy woman ventured one day to speak out her mind to him. As a reaction to such an antagonistic sentiment, the Master was thrown so violently into a fit of childlike protest that he jumped up from his seat instantaneously, his cloth dropped down from his loins, and he began to pace the room like a madman, cursing such a relationship in the strongest terms he could muster. The Mother heard all this from the Nahabat. Feeling humiliated by this insult to her daughter, she said to Golap-Ma, 'Just look at this! If she has been unthinking in her talk, should he not have sent her to me? What's the meaning

of abusing her like this?' She sent Golap-Ma at once to call the crazy woman to her, and when the woman came, she said affectionately, 'My daughter, you may as well not go to him, since your presence irritates him; you can come to me.'

In those days, many of the young devotees spent some nights at Dakshineswar practising spiritual disciplines under the Master's guidance. As overeating hinders concentration of mind, he kept a strict eye on their regimen, and instructed the Holy Mother to give Rakhal six *chapatis*, Latu five and Gopal-dada and Baburam four each. The Mother, however, could not tolerate this kind of limitation to her own field of motherly care; and hence she gave to each according to his need, much in excess of the Master's prescription. One day the Master discovered on enquiry from Baburam that he got five or six *chapatis* at night, and that the Mother was responsible for this. He accordingly went to her and tried to impress on her that she was spoiling their future by her heedless affection. But the Mother protested saying, 'Why do you get upset because he had just two more *chapatis*? I shall look to their future. Don't you take them to task for this matter of eating.' The Master said nothing by way of reply, but in his mind he saluted that all-conquering motherliness and left the place with a smile. He must have been delighted that day to find the Mother consciously entering on her future field of activity.

From Yogin-Ma we learn that the Mother welcomed the women devotees with the utmost affection and this pleased the Master. When that devout lady went to Dakshineswar for the first time, the Master came to learn that she was going without any food; and so he sent her to the Nahabat saying, 'There's some rice and vegetables inside; go and have your food.' The Mother hurriedly placed before her all that was available—rice, *luchi*,[1] vegetables, etc., and fed her with great care. That first meet-

1. Flat pieces of cake made with flour and fried in clarified butter.

ing ripened into intimacy, so much so, that when a few days later the Mother got into a boat to cross the Ganges for going to Kamarpukur to be present at her nephew Ramlal's marriage, Yogin-Ma kept on looking as long as the boat could be seen and then began to weep. The Master found her in that state and consoled her. When the Mother returned, he told her, 'That girl with big eyes who comes here, loves you very much. The day you left, she wept at the Nahabat.' The Mother said, 'Yes, her name is Yogen.[1]' The Mother had so much affection for and faith in Yogin-Ma that she consulted her at every turn. After Yogin-Ma had dressed her hair, the Mother would not untie the chignon for three or four days together and would say, 'No, it was dressed by Yogen; I shall untie when she comes again.'

Yogin-Ma, one day, noticed the Mother putting spices in some betel rolls, while others were prepared without them. Curiosity impelled her to ask, 'Mother, why did you not put cardamom and other spices in these? For whom are those meant, and for whom these?' The Mother replied, 'Yogen, these (the spiced ones) are for the devotees; I have to make them my own through love and care. And those are for the Master; he is already my own.'

There was then a constant flow of devotees and religious singing in groups or singly was the order of the day. The Mother who had consecrated her life for the service and happiness of the Master, and consequently of the devotees, had no rest. Cooking went on day and night. And yet in the midst of all this, her mind was ever at the feet of the Master. Owing to this incomparable concentration of mind, she seemed to know the Master's thoughts even before he opened his lips, and she arranged accordingly. Sarada, Purna, and others might not have the money to return to Calcutta either because of poverty or because

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1. The Mother called both Swami Yogananda and Yogin-Ma by the same name Yogen; and to distinguish between the two she often added son or daughter before the name.

their guardians were opposed to such visits. Therefore, the Master directed them to take the necessary money from the Mother. The fare from the Baranagore bazar to Beadon Square in Calcutta for a seat in a hackney carriage in those days, was one anna. The Mother knew that Sarada needed money since he had to come surreptitiously eluding his father's vigilance. So whenever Sarada came she kept in advance a one anna piece on the steps of the Nahabat for him to find at the time of departure. As soon as she heard the Master telling Narendra on his arrival, 'You will stay here today,' the Mother at once began boiling gram and preparing *chapatis*, for Narendra liked thick *chapatis* with gram soup. When the Master came to instruct the Mother about Narendra's food, he found that he had been anticipated. If women devotees came to Dakshineswar late in the evening, it became a problem for the Master to accommodate them during the night. Knowing as he did that the Nahabat was a cramped place, he used to ask them to sleep on the covered terrace outside his room; but the Mother assured them that there would be sufficient space for them in the Nahabat itself. The devotees had their food at the Nahabat and then went to the Master for a little talk. On returning to the Nahabat they found to their amazement that single-handed the Mother had cleaned up the whole place and spread beds for all. Moreover, she drew them all to her side so cordially that they felt no need to go elsewhere.

In this way, the great desire of the Master to give shape to his message on the one hand, and the deep affection of the Mother for her children on the other, combined to attract her more and more to the field that was eminently her own. Through this joint effort, too, the inner circle of devotees of the Mother was selected even in those early days. We have already referred in passing to some of her young sons who became monks afterwards. We have also on occasions referred to Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma who

were the Jaya and Vijaya[1] of the Holy Mother in the present incarnation. We shall refer to some more interesting and illuminating incidents about these two devout souls before we pass on to other topics.

After the Master went to Shyampukur for treatment, the Mother, left behind at Dakshineswar, was passing her days in great sorrow and anxiety. Just then Golap-Ma happened to tell Yogin-Ma casually in the course of a talk, 'It strikes me, Yogen, that the Master left for Calcutta because he was angry with the Mother.' When the Mother came to learn of this from Yogin-Ma, she could not control her tears. She at once proceeded to Shyampukur in a carriage and asked the Master, 'Is it true that you have come here because you are angry with me?' The Master replied, 'No, who told you so?' 'Golap,' replied the Mother. The Master flared up at this and said, 'Is that so? Did she make you cry by saying so? Does she not know who you are? Where is Golap? Let her come!' Fully consoled, the Mother came back to Dakshineswar. When Golap-Ma next appeared before the Master he reproached her saying, 'What's this that you said to make her cry? Don't you know who she is? Go at once and beg her pardon.' Golap-Ma forthwith walked to Dakshineswar and with tears in her eyes said, 'Mother, the Master is very angry with me. I said it all in sheer thoughtlessness.' The Mother made no direct reply, but with a laugh she patted Golap-Ma's back thrice saying, 'O dear Golap!' Golap-Ma's heart was instantly lightened.

When Golap-Ma first went to Dakshineswar, she was overwhelmed with grief for her only child, a daughter, named Chandi. The Master received her warmly and after more intimacy told the Mother; 'You should feed her (Golap-Ma) to her heart's content; if the stomach is full, the sorrow will be assuaged.' On another occasion he told

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1. Jaya and Vijaya are the two maids of the Mother of the Universe. The Holy Mother sometimes referred to Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma as her Jaya and Vijaya.

the Mother, 'You should take care of this brahmin girl (Golap-Ma). She it is who will be your constant companion.' Needless to say that the Mother accepted her with open arms, and Golap-Ma too, took up her position as the Mother's maid from that very time. There were slight differences of temperament between the two as we have noticed but they did not ever so slightly ruffle the surface of their lives,—so intimately bound to each other did they become.

We now turn to Yogin-Ma. When the Master was ill at Cossipore, she longed to go to Vrindaban for practising austerity, and she informed the Master accordingly. At this his face brightened up and he said encouragingly, 'So you want to go to Vrindaban! It'll be excellent. Do go there; you'll find everything there.' The Mother was then present in the room with his diet. He turned his eyes to her and asked Yogin-Ma, 'Did you tell her? What does she say?' 'Whatever was to be said has been said by you already,' intervened the Mother. 'What is there to add?' The Master did not seem to heed this, but advised Yogin-Ma again, 'My dear child, go after obtaining her consent—you will get everything.' Unmindful of this, the Mother picked up the empty bowl and started going downstairs. Yogin-Ma followed her.

Next morning Yogin-Ma came to Cossipore to take leave before starting on her pilgrimage. After making her obeisance to the Master she went to the Mother to bow down to her. The Mother then laid her hand on Yogin-Ma's head and as a blessing made *japa* of her *mantra*, counting it on her fingers. Two days later Yogin-Ma went to Vrindaban and took shelter in Kala Babu's Kunja (grove) on the Yamuna, which belonged to Balaram Babu's family and which was dedicated to a deity that received their regular worship.

12

IN UNDYING UNION

It was fast becoming clear from the steady deterioration in the health of the Master that after entrusting the task of spiritual regeneration to the worthy hands of the Holy Mother and the chosen disciples, he was fast approaching the day of final departure. But the Mother could not accept this as inevitable. She had experienced the grace of Simhavahini in her own life, had seen the economic condition of her father's family improve through the favour of Jagad-dhatri, and had received signs of the Lord's mercy in many ways and many a time in the days of stress and strain. Would not that compassionate God cast His benign look at them in this critical hour? Would not the Divine heart melt at the tears of a faithful wife? After long deliberation, the Mother decided to go to Tarakeshwar and lie there fasting day and night at the temple of Siva who is known as the fulfiller of all wishes; for once, at least, she must try and see if the inexorable Divine law had not an exception, if Providence could not be moved by the piteous wail of a creature in distress.

Five years earlier the Master had indicated the omens that would precede his passing away — he would accept food indiscriminately from any one, would spend the night in Calcutta, and would eat food a part of which had been given to somebody earlier — which had all come true even before he left Dakshineswar. On his return to Dakshineswar after spending the night at Balaram Babu's house during the car festival (*ratha-yatra*) of 1885, he told her of another sign, 'When you find many people accepting, honouring and adoring this (pointing to himself) as the Deity, you will know that the time of disappearance is near at hand.' That portent too, the Mother might have taken as having been already fulfilled; for were there not quite a number of devout souls who looked upon the Master as God incarnate? And while at Cossipore she got a concrete

illustration too. A few devotees went with some sweets one day to meet the Master at Dakshineswar. But to their dismay they learnt that he had gone to Calcutta for treatment; so they offered the sweets to the Master's picture and then took the *prasada.* When the news reached the Master, he said, 'Why did they make the offering to the picture instead of to the Mother?' The Holy Mother and others became upset at the news of this offering to a picture of the Master even while the Master was in flesh and blood; for such adoration of a living person augured ill for him. But the Master removed their consternation by emphatically asserting, 'Don't you be worried, my dear! I shall be worshipped in every house hereafter; I say this upon oath, so help me God.' Therefore it became very clear that not only was destiny against her, but that the Master also was determined to bid adieu. From that point of view, in fact, there was nothing to cheer her. And yet hope lingers though belief passes away; and nobody can keep silent without calling on God who is our only source of solace amid blank despair.

The Mother went to Tarakeshwar; the Master did not object. It is not known who were her companions. Perhaps Lakshmi Devi and a maid-servant went with her. She lay down there for two days without food and water — but there was no sign of Siva's blessing. On the second night, the Mother continued there as before, craving the Lord's mercy, when she heard a crackling sound much resembling the sound of some earthen jars piled up together being broken with a stick. That woke her up, and the thought took possession of her mind: 'Who is a husband in this world and of whom? Who is related to whom here? For whom am I sacrificing my life here?' It was as though a distant rumbling of the horn of Rudra, the great Destroyer, was ushering in the dissolution of the world, rending asunder all earthly ties, and creating in every heart an incomprehensible vacuum. The Mother got up from her bed and somehow felt her way to the basin behind the temple where

the holy water offered to Siva, had accumulated, and taking up a little of it in her hand she quenched her thirst. Then she felt relieved. Thus foiled in her attempt to save the Master, she left next day for Cossipore. The finite human mind sometimes shoots upward through some divine inspiration to lose itself in the infinitude of the cosmic mind getting thereby a new and all-encompassing outlook, as a result of which the old worldly ties look ephemeral and meaningless and are, therefore, automatically discarded. This immersion of the microcosm into the macrocosm is what we call renunciation. Through the influence of that overpowering self-abnegation the Mother was deflected from her resolve and returned disappointed to Cossipore. The Master knew all this, and in good humour he said, 'How now, my dear? Did you get anything? — nothing at all!'

The time of the Master's passing away was fast approaching—to prevent it was beyond human capacity. Mother had premonition of this in various other ways. She said, 'The Master too saw in a dream an elephant going out to get a medicine. Just as the elephant began digging the earth for the medicine, Gopal came and woke him up. He asked me, "Do you have any dream?" I saw Mother Kali with her neck turned aside, and asked Her, "Mother, why are you in this posture?" Mother Kali replied, "Because of his that thing there (pointing to the Master's sore in the throat) I too have it."' The Mother at once realized that if Mother Kali could not or would not cure the Master in spite of her suffering equally with him, then what could mere human beings do? Moreover, the Master also gave an explanation of his disease which was calculated to raise the Mother's mind above worldly considerations to a level of universal compassion. He said, 'I am being subjected to all the sufferings that there can be; none of you need have it again. I have suffered for all in the world.' It became quite evident to the Mother that that was the real explanation of the Master's martyrdom; otherwise why should such a sinless body have undergone such torture?

The month of August (1886) was well advanced. Through words and deeds the Master went on dropping hints that the day of final departure was at hand. But human hearts recoil from contemplating the poignant. Hence the devotees refused to believe their eyes and ears; and the Lord too, lifted the veil of that mortifying future momentarily and then covered up the devotees' minds in a shroud of mystery. One day the Master sent for the Mother through Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda), remarking that she was very intelligent and would, therefore, understand his condition. On her arrival, he said, 'Look here, my dear, I don't know why thoughts of Brahman are ever stirring my mind.' What answer could the Mother make? The sight of that frail, emaciated body was too heart-rending for her; hence she uttered a few consoling words and then turned her face round to wipe off her tears. How helpless she felt! It was impossible to hold back the Master's mind in its headlong rush to the quietude of Brahman.

On the day of passing away, the Master sat on his bed leaning against the pillows. It was a sick-bed, and the light of hope had been extinguished; and so all round there was a dark pall of sadness. All thought that the power of speech had left him; but when the Mother and Lakshmi Devi came, he said, 'So here you are? Look here, it seems I am going somewhere—all through water to a far-off place.' The Mother began weeping. But the Master continued, 'You need have no anxiety; you will be just as you have been so long; and they (meaning Narendra and others) will look after you and do for you as much as they have done for me. Do have an eye on dear Lakshmi.'

The sub-conscious of the Mother had been fluttering with trepidation at the black shadows of the imminent calamity passing over it. Everything around her seemed to be out of hinges and full of evil portent. She had been cooking some *khichudi* for her sons engaged in the Master's service; the bottom portion of it got burnt. She served the upper portion to the boys and ate the lower

portion herself. She had spread a piece of cloth on the roof for drying; it was not to be found. There was an earthen goblet; it fell and broke into pieces in the process of being lifted up.

Then came the midnight of the 15th August; and midnight passed into the small hours of the 16th. It was two minutes past one o'clock. That garden house dotted with shrubs and trees, on the outskirts of the city, was steeped in absolute silence; only the devotees sitting by the bed of Sri Ramakrishna kept a helpless vigil as they found him immersed in *samadhi*, which lengthened into hours till there was no possibility of a reawakening. The physician came to announce that all hope had been shattered. Next day the holy body was consigned to a sacred fire at the cremation ground on the Ganges at Cossipore; and when all was over, the ashes were gathered in a copper vessel which was carried to the garden house and placed on the Master's bed.

In the evening the Mother sat to remove her ornaments one by one; and when at last she was about to take off her gold bracelets, the Master suddenly appeared in his body just as it was before he had the disease, and taking hold of her hands said, 'Have I died that you are removing the signs of a married woman from your wrists?' She then desisted from doing so. Balaram Babu had brought a white piece of cloth without any coloured border, to be worn by her as a sign of widowhood. When he gave this to Golap-Ma to be passed on to the Mother, Golap-Ma said with a start, 'By Jove! Who is going to hand over to her the white cloth without coloured borders?' Later, when she went to the Mother, she found she had torn a portion of the broad border of her own cloth to make it very thin. From that day she wore clothes with thin red borders and not the absolutely white ones. For, there is really no end to the everlasting play of the Master; and there is really no separation of the Mother from him.

On the third day, food was offered before the reliquary. Now, the older devotees decided that after the Master had shuffled off his mortal coil, there was no meaning in retaining the garden house. But the young devotees like Narendra wanted to continue the lease for sometime more, so as to allow sufficient time to the Mother to get over the shock and to have a place for keeping the Master's ashes. But as they had no monetary backing they could not stand up against the older people. Therefore the final decision was that the house would be given up on the expiry of the lease, the urn containing the ashes would be removed before then to the Kankurgachhi garden of Ram Babu, which the Master had once made holy by a visit, and the Holy Mother would go elsewhere. But some of the young devotees did not readily agree to part with the ashes. For both the lay and the monastic devotees had settled at first by common consent that the copper urn would be interred in a plot of land to be purchased on the sacred Ganges. Considering, however, the great expenditure involved and for other reasons, the householders changed their view afterwards. As this new decision did not appeal to the young devotees, they removed more than half of the ashes and the pieces of bone to a separate vessel which was then sent to the house of Balaram Babu (*vide Udbodhan*, Vol. XVII. p. 440). Then they heartily co-operated in interring the first copper jar at Kankurgachhi on the 23rd August, which was the holy birthday of Sri Krishna.

The Holy Mother, who heard much of this controversy, took no sides in it because of her extreme mood of indifference consequent on the stunning blow; and she said to Golap-Ma with a sigh, 'Look at these bickerings, Golap; that precious person, worth his weight in gold, is gone, and they are quarrelling about his ashes!' How far removed from partisan consideration, indeed, was the clear vision of the Holy Mother even in that moment of agonizing grief! Soon she became ready to leave Cossipore. At

the invitation of the great devotee Balaram Babu, she went to his house on the afternoon of the 21st August. It can be well understood that at the passing away of the Master and the thought of her helpless condition, she was very much overwhelmed. Though subsequently she had a direct vision of the Master's permanent divine body and heard the call 'Mother' from the lips of her children, and though this assuaged her agony a little, yet the terrible physical separation was not easy to forget. At every turn, and with every thought the Mother was being reminded that the Master was not there just as he used to be. The devotees too, knew of this state of her mind. And they, therefore, planned to send her on a pilgrimage to places which had been sanctified by the Lord in his previous incarnations and on which He had impressed His indelible marks, so that by coming face to face with these indubitable signs of the Lord's undying presence she might forget the pangs of separation and by being far away from the places so fresh with the Master's memory, she might somewhat recover from that agonizing grief. Accordingly, she started for Vrindavan on the 30th August, 1886, accompanied by Golap-Ma, Lakshmi Devi, Master Mahashaya's wife, Swami Yogananda, Swami Abhedananda, and Swami Adbhutananda.

On the way they got down at Deoghar to worship Vaidyanatha (Siva) and then they proceeded to Banaras, where they stayed for some eight or ten days worshipping Viswanatha (Siva), goddess Annapurna, and other well-known deities. The Mother climbed the tower of Venimadhava, from which could be seen the city of Banaras. One day, during the evening services at the Viswanatha temple, her spiritual fervour was so highly enkindled that unconscious of what she was doing she walked to her dwelling place with unusually heavy steps. Questioned about this, she explained, 'The Master had led me by hand from the temple.' Along with others she visited Swami Bhaskarananda one day. The Swami was naked and He

said to them, 'Mothers, don't you feel shy, for you are all forms of the Mother of the Universe. How can any shame arise?' About her impression of the Swami the Mother said, 'What a poised, great soul! In heat and cold alike he sits uncovered!'

From Banaras they all reached Ayodhya, the birth-place of Sri Ramachandra, where they visited some places associated with his divine disport. On the way to Vrindavan from Ayodhya, the Mother got another vision of the Master under peculiar, circumstances. On her arm was the gold amulet which the Master wore in the name of his chosen deity. She was reclining with that arm uppermost near the window of the railway compartment in which she was travelling. The Master peeped in through the window to say, 'Mind you that the amulet is with you; see that it is not lost.' She at once took it off and put it into the tin box in which was kept the picture of the Master that she worshipped daily. She never wore it again, but worshipped it along with the picture. On arriving at Vrindavan they put up at the Kala Babu's grove, belonging to Balaram Babu's family, on the Yamuna.

It was about the middle of September when the rains were over and the woods of Vrindaban looked fresh and smiling. The trees had thick green foliage; the ground was covered with grass; the air was saturated with the sweet smell of flowers; all around could be heard the cry of peacocks and the lowing of cattle; there were deer grazing fearlessly by the wayside and taking to flight with raised ears at the sound of human steps; and the Yamuna, full to the brim, was coursing down with a murmuring sound. Vrindavan had still its wonted beauty and those associations of old—the Nikunja grove, the dust made wet by Radha's tears of separation, the fields of Vraja hallowed by the longing lingering looks of the cowherd girls searching for Krishna—all these were there, and everywhere the deep indelible impression of Krishna enkindled an irresistible desire to see him; but he himself was nowhere to

be found. So after arrival at Vrindavan, there welled forth from the heart of the Mother, bleeding from the recent wound of separation, an excruciating moan of agony. Before this, she had visions of the Master at least three or four times. But the lack of an inalienably tangible union with him to whose feet all the strings of her heart were tied, oppressed her mind and aroused in it the endless question, 'Where is he?' After coming to Vrindavan the Mother was ever in tears, and to these were added the tears of Yogin-Ma who had preceded her there. When the two met, the Mother clasped Yogin-Ma to her heart. Having heard everything from others and having the mournful Mother before her very eyes, Yogin-Ma also began to bemoan the loss continually. Then the Master appeared to them one night and said, 'Well, my dears, why do you weep so much? Here am I. Where indeed could I have gone? It's just like walking from this room to that.'

Following this vision and assurance, the Mother's flow of tears lessened; but the pangs of separation were still there, and they now found expression through a different channel. In the section of the *Bhagavata*, called the *Gopi-gita*, we read that when Krishna suddenly disappeared from the field of his amorous disport, the cowherd lasses, overpowered with grief and forgetful of everything around, began a long search for him; but baffled in this and therefore lost in anxious longing for him all the more, they gradually came to identify themselves mentally with the object of their intense love, so much so that they started impersonating him in various ways. In the body and mind of the Mother also was now to be seen a similar self-absorption. Forgetful of herself she sometimes walked across the vast sandy shore to the waters of the Yamuna unknown to anybody and she had to be searched out and persuaded to return. One does not know, she might have then thought of herself as Radha, the sweetheart of Krishna, and of Sri Ramakrishna as Krishna, and was thus lost in the bliss of union in the Vrindavan of her heart! It is said that she

once told a devotee, 'I, indeed, am Radha.' At times, again, rapt in the thoughts of the Master, she became one with him. One day she lost all outer consciousness in a deep *samadhi* from which she could not be roused in spite of Yogin-Ma's repeating the Lord's name in her ears for a long time. Then Swami Yogananda made a similar attempt, when there appeared signs of reawakening, and she said, 'I shall eat,' just as the Master used to say after a deep *samadhi*. When some food, water, and betel were held before her, she took a little just like the Master; nay, she chewed the betel just like him, after biting off the conical portion with her teeth. At that time Swami Yogananda put several questions to her, to which she replied in the Master's manner. In fact, all her gestures and postures at that time resembled those of the Master. After coming back to the normal plane, she herself admitted that the Master had engulfed her for the time being.

The Mother being thus occupied with the thoughts of the Master, her talks and movements appeared to be unrelated to the actualities of life and rather like those of a simple child. One day, on seeing a dead body, covered with flowers and garlands, being carried to the cremation ground with music, she said with some eagerness, 'Look there, look, how the man (by dying in Vrindavan) has attained (the eternal) Vrindavan. We came here to lay down our bodies; but we never had so much as fever for a day! You can well calculate how old we have grown — we have seen our fathers, and the elder brothers of our husbands!'

Yogin-Ma and others burst out laughing at this and said, 'What a strange thing you say Mother: you have seen your father! Who ever does not see one's father?'

The Mother lived at Vrindavan for about a year. A month later Master Mahashaya's wife was attacked with malaria and she had to leave for Calcutta with Swami Abhedananda. Swami Adbhutananda also went to Calcutta after six

months on getting some sad news from Ramachandra Datta's house.

The long stay at Vrindavan had the effect of bringing to some extent the Mother's mind down to the normal plane. The Master ultimately granted her a continuous flow of bliss in proportion as he had previously given her grief. She went round the temples daily, seeing the different images and sitting for meditation at suitable places. She must have been blessed with many visions at that time, though she never gave them out. Only of one of these incidents did she tell Yogin-Ma. That day she had been to the temple of Radharamana where she had a vision of the wife of Navagopal Ghosh (both husband and wife being devotees of the Master), standing by the deity and fanning Him. On her return home she said, 'Yogen, Navagopal's wife is very pure. I had such and such a vision.'

Some time during their stay there the Mother and her party undertook a ceremonial circumambulation of Vrindaban for more than a fortnight. During this walk the Mother seemed to be looking at the roads, fields, and forests of the place with intense interest; at times she stopped altogether lost in her reverie. To Yogin-Ma and others it was clear that she was in a spiritual mood and was having some visions too. So now and then they put questions to her out of curiosity. But the Mother put them off with a simple answer, 'No, that's nothing; move on.'

Here the Master got one of his unfinished tasks accomplished through the Mother; and in the Mother's life too, a new chapter opened. The Master appeared before the Mother and said, 'Give this *mantra* to Yogin.' on the first day the Mother thought that it was a mere phantasy and so did nothing. Besides, she felt ashamed, thinking, 'People will say, "Mother has begun to have disciples within such a short period (of her mourning)"' She did not also pay heed to a second vision of this kind.

On the third day she remonstrated with the Master, 'I don't so much as talk with him (Yogin); how can I impart the *mantra*?' The Master suggested, 'You tell daughter Yogen; she will be present.' He also told her the *mantra*. The Mother inquired of Swami Yogananda through Yogin-Ma whether he had his initiation. He said, 'No, Mother, the Master didn't give me any particular *mantra* of any special deity. I repeat one according to my own choice.' He further let her know that he too had been asked by the Master to be initiated by the Mother, but he could not make the request because of his natural modesty. At last the Mother agreed to initiate him. On the appointed day, the Mother had an onset of spiritual fervour as she sat in worship before the picture and the physical remains of the Master. She called in Swami Yogananda and while still in that ecstiatic mood, imparted the *mantra*, which was uttered so loudly that Yogin-Ma could hear it from the adjoining room. Swami Yogananda was the Mother's first disciple.

Towards the end of this period of stay at Virndavan, the Mother once went to Hardwar with Swami Yogananda, Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and Lakshmi Devi. On the way Swami Yogananda was suddenly attacked with high fever in the train. When Yogin-Ma was giving him pomegranate seeds, the Mother saw as though the Master himself was being fed. In a state of unconsciousness resulting from high temperature, Swami Yogananda saw a terrible form standing in front of him and telling him, 'I would have seen you through but I am helpless. There's the order of Paramahamsa Deva (Sri Ramakrishna), and I have to quit at once.' When departing, the figure pointed to a deity with red clothes and directed him to offer some *rasa-gollas*[1] to her. The fever abated at once. At Hardwar the Mother bathed at the Brahma-kunda and visited the

1. A Bengali sweet made with balls of cheese boiled in syrup, to make them spongy and juicy; whence the name *rasa-golla* or juice-ball.

temples. She had with her some nail-parings and hair of the Master, a portion of which she intended to offer in the holy water of the Ganges at Hardwar. This she did at the Brahma-kunda. Besides, she crossed the Ganges to climb the Chandi hill and worship the goddess Chandi there.

Then with her companions she went to Jaipur. After they had seen the main deity Govindaji, they went on visiting the other deities, when suddenly they came to a goddess, on seeing whom Swami Yogananda cried out that this was the very deity he had seen during his last fever. She was Sitala, the goddess of small pox. The goddess was offered half a rupee worth of *rasagollas* which were fortunately available near the temple gate. From Jaipur they went to Pushkar where the Mother climbed the Savitri hill. Though her right leg had become rheumatic at Dakshineswar, she could still move about freely, so that it was not too strenuous for her to ascend the Savitri and the Chandi hills and walk round Vrindavan for a fortnight.

After spending a year in the holy places of the north, they proceeded to Calcutta by way of Allahabad, where at the sacred confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna, the Mother offered the remaining portion of the Master's nails and hair. Of this the Mother said, 'Is the Master's hair an ordinary thing? When I went to Prayag (Allahabad) after his demise, I carried with me his hair for immersion in the holy water. As I took up the hair in hand with a view to offering it in the placid water of the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna, a wave leaped up unawares and took away the hair from my hand and hid itself again in the placid water around. That holy place snatched away that thing from my hand for its own sanctification.'

At this place Lakshmi Devi, a widow as she was, had her head shaved clean according to the custom of the place; the Mother did not do so. Before her mind's eye

was being played then the drama of her constant union with the Master and through the physical eyes, too, she was having frequent visions of him. Accordingly, she could not remove her hair just as she could not take off her ornaments earlier. Thus brimming with the happiness born of visiting the most sacred places and the repeated visions of the Master, she returned to Calcutta, where she stayed in the house of Balaram Bose.

13

IN HER HUSBAND'S COTTAGE

The Holy Mother stayed at Balaram Babu's house for about a week and then went to Kamarpukur. Before starting for the place, she visited Dakshineswar to bow down before all the deities and have another look at everything associated with the Master. Swami Yogananda, Golap-Ma, and some others accompanied her up to Kamarpukur. They went to Burdwan by train, from where they walked the rest of the way for lack of money. The first phase of their journey from Burdwan to Uchalan, a distance of about sixteen miles, tired out the Mother very much, and she felt hungry. At Uchalan, Golap-Ma managed to cook a little *khichudi* on tasting which the Mother said, 'O Golap, what a delicacy you have prepared!' Swami Yogananda and others left for their places after staying at Kamarpukur for a few days. Then began the Mother's sorrowful life at that village, during which time she was practically alone, as she had none to sympathise with her or even to talk to her, barring some two or three old acquaintances.

When during the Master's illness at Cossipore, his nephew Ramlal came to see him one day, the Master told him, 'You will serve Bhavatarini (Kali at Dakshineswar), and so you will not lack anything. He then turned to the Mother and said, 'You will live at Kamarpukur, and look after Lakshmi a little. You will not have to provide for her food; but see that she does not leave home to go elsewhere! The devotees will have as much veneration for you as they have for me.' To Ramlal, again, he said, 'See that your aunt stays at Kamarpukur.' Ramlal replied, 'She will stay wherever she wills.' The Master easily saw through the meaning of that statement, and he reproved him saying, 'How is that, my boy? Why have

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1. She became a widow soon after marriage and stayed in her father's house at Kamarpukur.

you been born a man?' Lakshmi Devi had been to Vrindavan with the Mother, but she did not go to Kamarpukur, preferring to live with her brothers at Dakshineswar. As for Ramlal, he not only refused to shoulder any responsibility for the Mother, but also created a tremendous difficulty for her. Trailokyanath Vishwas, son of Mathuranath and grandson of Rani Rasmani granted a small allowance of seven rupees for the Mother. But during her stay at Vrindavan, Ramlal dinned it into the ears of the cashier of the temple that the devotees of the Master were looking after her, and that there was, therefore, no need for an allowance from the temple. So that contribution was stopped.[1] Swami Vivekananda and others argued against such a step, but to no effect. When the Mother heard of it, she said with extreme indifference, 'If they have stopped it, let them have their way. When even the Master is gone, what shall I do with money?' The devotees of the Master had decided that they would contribute ten rupees a month for the maintenance of the wife of their guru. But that pious wish did not materialize. Hence the life of the Mother at Kamarpukur was not only solitary, but also one of privation.

Sri Ramakrishna once said to her, 'You will stay at Kamarpukur; you will grow pot-herbs, eat your rice with greens, and call on Hari.' This was not an order, but it was a wish of the Master, a hint of a means of her livelihood. As though to fulfil those words, the Mother had to follow that very pattern of life in those days. There were times when she boiled some rice, but had no salt to savour it with. When after some days the state of affairs at Kamarpukur became known in Calcutta, the devotees took her there. But that was long after. In the meantime the Mother

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1. The Holy Mother said: 'Trailokya used to give me seven rupees. After the Master's death, Dinu, the cashier, and all others conspired to stop that money. My relatives, too, who were there, treated me as an ordinary mortal and joined with them.' (*Udbodhan*, Vol. XXVII, pp. 11-12). See also *Sri-Sri Lakshmimani devi*.

continued to suffer, without even informing anybody, in the very mud hut which the Master had bequeathed to her; for even then was ringing in her ears that counsel of the Master, 'Mind you, don't put forth your hand to anybody even for a dime. You will have no lack of coarse food and cloth. Once you put forth your hand for a dime from any one, you sell your head to him....Even living on charity is preferable to living in other people's houses. Even if any one of the devotees should offer to keep you in his house with love and respect, you should not give up your own home at Kamarpukur.'

Let us for a moment stop here to look around the Kamarpukur of those days. The Kamarpukur of the boyhood days of the Master must have changed a good deal with the change of time, as is quite natural; still the village did not, in all probability appear new to the Mother's eyes, though there is a world of difference between the Kamarpukur of the later part of 1887 and the Kamarpukur of today (1954). To the south of the Master's house at that time, and contiguous to it, was the house of Shuklal Goswami, known popularly as the Gosain-mahal, which looked something like a land-holder's office establishment with high brick walls around and a brick house in the middle. Near the present well south of the Master's temple was the entrance of the Gosain-mahal which opened to the road on the west. South of the mahal was a small pond on whose bank was the memorial of a suttee of the Pain family. Further south was the guest house of the Lahas. East of the dwelling house of the Lahas, in the centre of the village, is a big pond called the Kamarpukur (tank of the Kamars), on the south-west corner of which the Kamars (lit., black-smiths) still live. Dhani Kamarni, who acted as the midwife at the birth of the Master was born among these people. North of the Master's house is the big pond called the Haldar-pukur or the tank of the Haldars, who no longer live in the village, but have shifted to other places. In the Mother's time the two storeyed

brick house of the Lahas was still habitable and the famiiy was well off. Near the Master's house there were many sweetmeat sellers and starting from the north-eastern corner of the house up to the market place there were rows of shops on either side of the main village road. The Dome (sweeper) quarters along the road, to the north-west of the Master's house, had not been vacated then. And the Yugis (weavers) still had their homesteads between the Master's house and the Haldar-pukur, and they still conducted worship at their Siva temple. The mango grove of Manik Raja had not been denuded, and the tall palm trees still reflected themselves on the calm and transparent waters of the tanks and ponds seattered everywhere.

The Master's homestead then consisted of three mud houses for dwelling purposes, with thatched roofs, standing in a line on the southern side of the village road running from east to west. The house on the east outside the courtyard, served as a parlour. The house in the middle, which was the largest and over which another storey was raised later, was used by Rameshwar, the elder brother of the Master. The westernmost house was used by the Master, and in this was spent the Kamar-pukur phase of the life of the Mother. Between these two dwelling houses was a small door leading to the northern road. At right angles to the Master's bedroom was the shrine of Raghuvira built of mud and straw. The kitchen house along the southern boundary wall had three rooms, one of which was used by the Mother. In the middle of the eastern wall was the entrance to the court-yard. Along this wall, between the entrance and the kitchen was the husking shed where the Master was born.

The altar of Raghuvira and other deities that existed in those days was built by the Master's father Kshudiram Chattopadhyaya with earth carried by himself on his head. At present there are four deities—the image of

Gopala installed by Lakshmi Devi, the white stone emblem of Rameswara Siva brought by Kshudiram from Rameswar, the Raghuvira stone which he got in a dream and a pitcher filled with water, painted with vermilion, and holding mango leaves on its top, which represents the goddess Sitala. About Sitala the Mother said, 'She, indeed, is our family deity. I heard it related how my father-in-law saw in a dream that the Great Mother, in her form of Sitala—a little girl with a robe red as vermilion, was sweeping away all calamities, all the refuse, with brooms in her hand, and holding a pitcher at her waist, sprinkling ambrosial water with the (mango) leaves, thereby bringing peace to all beings by removing all cares.[1] Sitala is only one of the aspects of the Great Mother; that's why there's that pitcher painted with vermilion and containing water for bringing about peace. The water is changed on special days.' The Mother also stated that Raghuvira was the same as Ramachandra whose birthplace was in the north-west; and so the Master's father offered him *khichudi* to suit his north-western taste.

Kamarpukur was then a flourishing, populous, and busy village; and because it was so, it frightened the Mother, full of modesty as she was. Moreover, these people without culture, without liberal ideas and sympathy, remained unmoved at the helpless condition of this widow, and at the same time they lacked any curiosity for imbibing higher ideas from her. It was natural, therefore, for her to be faced with many problems. She continued to wear her bracelets, in obedience to the bidding of the Master. But the rural critics unmindful of such a vision, became increasingly vociferous; and she took these away from her hands. Her second problem was, how to live so far away from the Ganges, a love for whose holy waters

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1. In Bengali 'Shital Karchhen', making cool or removing the heat. Sitala is feminine of Sital. Sitala is generally the goddess of pox or similar calamities; but the Mother here gives the word a higher meaning, equating Sitala with the Universal Mother.

was ingrained in her. We saw her going on sacred occasions with village women to the Ganges for a dip, not to speak of her stay on its bank at Dakshineswar for a long thirteen years. Such maladjustments made her a little nervous, and she thought she would one day go for a bath in that river again. Just then she saw the Master approaching along the road in front, followed by Narendra, Baburam, Rakhal, and other devotees. From his blessed feet gushed forth a stream of water which moved before him in waves; and so she thought, 'I see that he himself is everything; from his blessed feet springs the Ganges!' Hence she plucked handfuls of red china-roses from near Raghuvira's shrine and laid them as an offering on the waters of this Ganges. Then the Master told her, 'Don't remove the bracelets from your hands. Don't you know the Vaishnava Tantra?' The Mother replied, 'What is Vaishnava Tantra? I know nothing of it.' Gaur-dasi will come this afternoon,' said the Master, 'you will hear from her.' That very afternoon came Gauri-Ma, who explained to the Mother with the help of the Vaishnava scriptures how there can be no such thing as widowhood for her, since her husband's body was not material but spiritual; furthermore, she was none other than Lakshmi herself, the goddess of fortune and the consort of Vishnu. For her to be without ornaments would mean the deprivation of the whole world of its good things.[1] Later on, when Yogin-Ma went to Kamarpukur, the Mother while describing that incident to her added, 'The Master then stood at the foot of yonder peepul tree. I saw at last the Master disappearing in the body of Naren...Eat the dust of the place, bow down.' When this news travelled from mouth to mouth and reached Swami Vivekananda, he said that it would have been better for him not to have heard of the entry of the Master into his body. However that might have been, one

1. Some Bengali books, for instance, *Gouri-Ma* (pp. 110-12) place this incident at Vrindavan. But the Mother recounted it as we have presented it (*vide Sri Mayer Katha*, part II, p. 148).

cannot but note that the incident made a tremendous impression on the Mother's mind about the mission of the Master and the sanctity of Kamarpukur. She got over the fear of idle gossip and put on the bracelets again; and her cloth also continued to have a thin red border instead of being wholly white. These she never discarded till the end.

The rural critics too, became silent. Such problems like these agitate most the womenfolk, and the solutions also emerge from them. When hostile gossip about the Mother reached the ears of Prasannamayi, daughter of the village landlord, Dharmadas Laha, who had been a widow from early life and was respected by all around for her virtue and wisdom, she folded her hands respectfully and touching her forehead with them in token of salutation, said, 'Gadai (Ramakrishna) and Gadai's wife—they are divine.' The scurrilous women of the village never afterwards opened their mouths.

Although the two problems of the Mother, viz., wearing of ornaments and living near the Ganges, were thus solved, the other complicated ones defied solution for sometime. Soon after she came to the village, she sought the help of Prasannamayi and Dhani Kamarni for securing a companion to be by her side. Prasannamayi gave her the assurance: 'As to that, my dear, you need have no anxiety; my maid-servant will sleep with you at night.' If the maid-servant failed to turn up, Dhani's sister Shankari slept in her house at night, and one of their brothers helped her at odd jobs. Prasannamayi always looked after her needs, and the Mother too, relied on her for advice. Prasannamayi then lived in the Gosain-mahal. She was very devotional in temperament and liked to look after the comforts of guests and brahmins. So she and the Holy Mother spent long hours in talking over religious matters.

In spite of this casual help and oral sympathy, the Mother still felt very lonely and unsafe. She was well prepared to spend her days by tying her worn-out cloth in a hundred knots, digging the earth with a spade, and

growing pot-herbs for her food; but over the uncertainty of the future, family differences, and social indifference and oppression, she had no control whatsoever. True it was that from the psychological point of view she was quite free from such fears after the Master's vision, as she herself said, 'Then, as I began to have visions of the Master, that fear gradually subsided.' These visions again were intimate. One day the Master appeared and said, 'Feed me with *khichudi*.' The Mother thought that as Raghuvira was identical with Ramakrishna, though they differed in form, it would be enough to offer the *khichudi* to the former. She did so, thinking all the while in a spiritual mood that the Master himself was having his meal. But despite this spiritual sublimity, the environmental antagonism continued just as before and caused not a little anxiety.

The question crops up here, 'When the Mother was in these circumstances, what were her people at Jayrambati doing?' We know that they were not particularly well off. Her mother, Shyamasundari Devi, was having a very hard time. Still, when she heard of her daughter's distress, she sent her son, Kalikumar, to Kamarpukur to bring her to Jayrambati. But the Mother refused to go just then. When she did go after some time, Shyamasundari could not check her tears at the sight of her extreme poverty. We like to fancy that this visit was during the annual Jagad-dhatri worship, for which the Mother had an innate attraction and as such, would not have liked to miss the occasion. Shyamasundari Devi took this occasion to hold her back, but the daughter replied, 'Now, I am going to Kamarpukur, Mother. Afterwards it'll be as He ordains.'

In the course of a short time, a great change came over the Kamarpukur family. The Mother's nephews, Ramlal and Shivaram and her niece, Lakshmi Devi then lived generally at Dakshineswar, though they very often came to their village home to stay there for short periods. We have noted that Ramlal (or Ramlal-dada) was somewhat indifferent towards the Mother. But this cannot be said

about Shivaram or Shibu-dada, as he was generally called. Shibu-dada received from the Mother his first alms after his investiture with the sacred thread, and so he regarded her more as his god-mother than as an aunt and the Mother too, treated him as a son. Long after, when the Mother was permanently residing at Jayrambati, Shibu-dada sat for his lunch at Kamarpukur one day; but when he had half finished, the desire grew in him to eat something from his god-mother's hand; and so he walked to Jayrambati and after having been fed by Holy Mother returned to Kamarpukur with a betel in his mouth given by her. We have many such instances of the Mother's affection for all of them.

Once during this period, Lakshmi Devi and many others were present at Kamarpukur. Till then the family was a joint one. But as misfortune would have it, the family was broken up by partition. Lakshmi Devi was a Vaishnava by temperament. Sometimes she sang Vaishnava songs inside the house with a sweet voice, which attracted people of a similar faith. The Mother could not be quite easy about this. She remembered that when Lakshmi Devi sang in this way before the Master, imitating fully the gestures and postures of professional singers, the Master, while enjoying it, was amused; but he warned the Mother, 'That's Lakshmi's temperament; don't you tread on her footsteps and throw your modesty to the winds.'[2] Besides this difference, the divergence of outlook in daily talks and actions between the Holy Mother and the rest of the family became more pronounced as days rolled on. The Mother preferred to spend the rest of her days peacefully in the thought of the Master, while around her others swirled the currents and cross-currents of the world into whose vortex they wanted to draw the Mother as well. The Mother remained unperturbed and unruffled, never uttering a word of protest. But the Chatterji family did nothing to avert the split that is usual under such circumstances. Thus, despite the passivity on the one side,

the aggressiveness on the other threw the Mother out of the main body. One day, on her return from Jayrambati, the Mother found that Ramlal-dada had left for Dakshineswar with the others after making some arrangement for the daily worship of Raghuvira. To her share had fallen the little cottage of the Master; she entered therein determined to keep up its sanctity.

On a study of the Mother's life we come to learn that commencing from her arrival at Kamarpukur in September 1887, she lived there for about nine months (up to April, 1888), after which the devotees brought her to Calcutta. From Calcutta she again went to Kamarpukur in February next and lived there almost for a similar period. Most probably, the subsequent periods of her stay there were never so long, though she came to live there quite a number of times.[1] It is not possible to determine definitely the time of various incidents that took place during those periods of stay. In the account so far presented, we have made no attempt to date the incidents exactly; and in what follows, too, we shall not try to do more than indicate the dates in a general way.

During the Mother's stay at Kamarpukur, the visits from the devotees were few and far between. Of course, most of them were too poor to undertake the pilgrimage; but the few who went there were received heartily by the Mother, for the meetings of persons that are akin and familiar were always delightful. Such visits rather relieved the monotony of her otherwise dull village life. But all visits were not welcome; on the contrary, some were a source of trouble. Once at least, the Mother had to face such an embarrassing situation. Harish, a devotee of the Master was a constant visitor at the first Math of

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1. From the notes of Master Mahashaya we gather that she lived at Kamarpukur during the following periods: End of October 1890; February, and July to October 1891, July of 1892, January and July of 1893; 13th May 1895; November 1895 to January 1896; May, and Durga-puja days (September-October) of 1897.

the Ramakrishna Order at Baranagore, and this frightened his wife. With a view to counteracting this tendency to renunciation, she surreptitiously applied drugs and charms, which brought about a certain derangement of his mind. While still under the influence of those drugs, Harish visited the Mother at Kamarpukur. The Mother could at once see through the mind of the man and hence wrote to the Math to take him away. Accordingly, Swamis Saradananda and Niranjanananda started for Kamarpukur. But before they could reach there, Harish's lunacy grew out of control, and the Mother had to devise her own remedy for this. We present the incident in her own words:

'At this time Harish came and stayed at Kamarpukur. One day, I was returning from a neighbouring house. As I stepped into the courtyard, Harish began chasing me. Harish was not in his senses then; his wife had drugged him and madness had followed upon it. There was nobody else in the house; so where could I escape? In a hurry, I began circling round the barn of paddy (near the Master's birthplace). But he would not give up the chase. After going round for seven times, I could run no longer. Then I stood firm working myself up to my full stature (lit., assuming my own form). And then, placing my knee on his chest and taking hold of his tongue, I slapped him on his cheeks so hard that he began to gasp for breath. My fingers became red.'

It is difficult now to ascertain in what sense the Mother used the words 'my full stature.' Many believe that since the Mother was an incarnation of the Mother of the Universe, it was possible for her to assume all kinds of divine forms and attitudes; and in the present context, she became Vagala to punish with heroic hands the demon in the person of Harish.[1] There is no reason why a devotee should not believe this; but even

1. *Vagala* is one of the ten *Mahavidyas*, forms of the Great Mother. In that form she killed a demon in the very same way as the Mother punished Harish.

a matter-of-fact man will be surprised to see how the Mother, who was noted all along for her modesty, meekness and mercy, could at a critical moment be on her mettle. When we look more closely into such incidents of her life, it strikes us that the poet who penned the line in the *Chandi*, 'Of all beings in the three worlds (heaven, earth and hell), in you alone, O goddess, is seen a kindness of heart combined with heroism in fight,' was truly a seer. That punishment cured Harish not only for the time being. Later he fled to Vrindaban on the arrival of Swami Niranjanananda, and there became fully normal after some time.

One winter morning, in the beginning of 1888, Krishnabhavini Devi, wife of the great devotee Balaram-Babu, and her mother Matangini Devi, came to the Master's birthplace from Antpur with a brahmin girl and a faithful man as escort. As devout Hindus they knew that their guru's household, and that of a brahmin too, should not be burdened on any account, and hence they placed sufficient money in the Mother's hands for making a suitable offering to Raghuvira, whose *prasada* only they would eat. The Mother made suitable arrangements for their comfort, and on the fourth day she took them to Jayrambati, where, too, they spent three nights and then left for Calcutta by way of Kamarpukur[1].

In the midst of fear and poverty, the Holy Mother kept burning the lamp of her spiritual ministry. It was probably during her second stay at Kamarpukur. There lived a monk from Orissa in a cottage attached to the

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1. The incident had an important bearing on the Mother's subsequent life. It can be inferred that, though the Mother tried her utmost to hide her poverty and helplessness from the devotees, their loving eyes penetrated into the truth; and therefore, after their return to Calcutta they told the other devotees all these facts. As a result the Mother was soon brought to Calcutta. The other version is that uncle Prasanna, who then lived in Calcutta, divulged the facts to Ramlal, Golap-ma, and others, and thus the devotees were stirred to action. In any case, Golap-Ma took a leading part in this matter.

outer wall of Gosain-mahal, inside which dwelt Prasanna-mayi who looked after the monk's needs. He had incurred the displeasure of some hot-headed and well-connected young men of the locality, so that he was on the point of leaving the village, when the Mother came to his help. The monk commanded the respect of the common folk; and thus with their help she proceeded to build for him a cottage at the south-west corner of Haldar-pukur. The rainy season was then imminent and the sky looked threatening. Hence the Mother prayed fervently with folded hands, 'O Lord, kindly forbear, kindly forbear! Let his thatch be completed and then you can pour as much as you like.' After the monk had been given a place to lay his head in, the Mother used to supply him with his foodstuff, though she had hardly sufficient for herself; and inquired of him every morning and evening, 'Father monk, how are you, dear?' But the monk did not live there for long; for, as Providence would have it, he expired soon in that cottage.

Though the Mother was in extremely indigent condition in the beginning, matters improved a little in course of time. The devotees, coming to know of her difficulties, organized what help they could. In addition, her share of the land at Shihar, left as a trust by Master in the name of the family deity, and the Lakshmi-jala land which came down from the Master's father, Kshudiram, as a heritage, yielded sufficient paddy not only for herself but also for some charity. Towards the end of the period we are discussing now, there was a maidservant named Sagarer Ma (Sagar's mother) who helped the Mother in her domestic work. From her it has been gathered that she used to do the shopping for the Mother. A portion of whatever the Mother cooked at noon, she kept in a pot for Sagarer Ma, and when the woman came, she handed it over to her saying, 'Put this in your mouth first and drink some water, and after that begin your work.' During the three days that the goddess Durga is worshipped annually in Bengal,

special worship was done and offerings made to Sitala by the Chatterjis at their Kamarpukur house. Brahmins were fed on this occasion. When the time for the feast came, the Mother used to say, 'Shibu (Shibu-dada), you spread the leaf-plates and serve salt and water, while I serve rice on all the leaves for the brahmins.' Sagarer Ma further says, 'Hers was the store of Lakshmi (goddess of wealth), as it were; nothing ran short. Whatever surplus there remained, she lovingly gave away to us the next day.' Over and above all this, the Holy Mother fed a number of guests.

We have noticed the Mother's diligence at Dakshineswar, Shyampukur and Cossipore. At Kamarpukur too, the same assiduity was in evidence, rather it increased because of the manifold responsibilities she was burdened with. She got together all that was necessary for cooking food, cooked it, and offered it to Raghuvira with all punctiliousness. If Shibu-dada happened to be at Kamarpukur he performed the worship, otherwise somebody else did it. Before the daily worship commenced, the Mother finished her bath in the Haldar-pukur and started cooking on two ovens, and this was finished before the sun moved away from the verandah (i.e., before noon), it being unbefitting to offer food to the deities after mid-day.

Of a truth, the Mother tried her best to follow the Master's wishes—she was ready to wear herself out at Kamarpukur through toil, tears, privation, and disease. But there is a limit to endurance whether physical or mental. Where the environment is wholly unhelpful or antagonistic, one with a sense of self-respect cannot continue spiritual practices long in a course of strenuous adjustment and compromise. Differences of outlook were there to be sure; in addition, the moral and spiritual atmosphere of the village was unbearable for her. The way in which the influential young men of the village misbehaved towards the monk from Orissa, disregarding the intervention of such a venerable lady as Prasannamayi,

set the Mother thinking much about her own future. And on top of all this came the insistent calls from her children in Calcutta, which ultimately proved too strong for her affectionate heart. Ultimately, Kamarpukur ceased to be her main place of residence. This does not, however, mean that she neglected her husband's bequest; it only means that she took up her task in a wider and more effective sense. And though she did not permanently stay at Kamarpukur, she spent money for the proper maintenance of the Master's cottage. If any devotee went that way, she reminded him of its sanctity and advised him to spend the night in it, so that he might imbibe some of its holiness. She helped her nephew Ramlal with money in putting a new storey over their own dwelling house. And she bestowed particular care on the worship of Raghuvira and spent money for the purpose.

Her latter-day disciples were curious for details about her leaving Kamarpukur and plied her with various questions. One devotee asked her, 'Mother, you don't so much as visit the Master's house; when you come to the village from Calcutta, you go straight to your father's house. Are you, in this, treading in the footsteps of your predecessors?' The Mother laughed heartily and replied, 'Not so, my son! Can I forget the Master's house? Shibu is my god-son. But the Master is now no longer in the physical body; I am pained if I go there. That's why I don't go.' The irremediable pangs of separation was there to be sure, but to that were added the external maladjustments owing to the antagonism, negligence, and inequities of the people around her, of which she seldom spoke as it hurt her to expose others' faults. On rare occasions only she opened out her mind a little. To a boy devotee who attended on her, she said, 'When after the Master's passing away I moved about here and there for sometime and then went to live at Kamarpukur, my relatives seemed to be indifferent towards me. And coming to learn of the high-handedness of the villagers, my

mother brought me here (to Jayrambati); she did not allow me to live at Kamarpukur any more. From that time on I have been living with my brothers through stress and strain. And now, again, they complain, "She does not look after us." The human mind is strange indeed.'

14

WITH THE DEVOTEES

It took quite a long time for the news of the Mother's misery at Kamarpukur to percolate to the Calcutta devotees. The young monks were then travelling here and there impelled by the desire for a life of absolute surrender to Providence; they, therefore, knew nothing of this. Swami Saradananda said afterwards, 'We could not then imagine that the Mother could not even get a pinch of salt.' After eight or nine months, when the devotees learnt the true state of affairs, they finalized their plan to accommodate her in Calcutta and then transmitted their request to her. The Mother knew what was in the hearts of the devotees. She was aware of the irrationality of rejecting the call of such loving followers and continuing in the adverse atmosphere of Kamarpukur. Yet she could not make up her mind without considering fully a few intricate questions. The Master had reminded her off and on that modesty is the highest virtue of a woman. Would she be able to maintain her habitual seclusion in the new surroundings?

The second question was more serious, or rather it was the first question in a more complicated setting. Her travels between Jayrambati and Dakshineswar were nothing uncommon from the social point of view, so long as the Master was there. But now that he was no more, could the Mother proceed to Calcutta overriding the prejudices and narrow notions of village folk? The Mother herself related how the problem was solved: When my coming here (Calcutta) was being talked of, after the Master's passing away, I was at Kamarpukur. Many there said, "Good heavens! They are young boys, how can you possibly live with them?" I knew in my heart, of course, that I would live here. Still one has to take account of public opinion; and so I consulted many. Some again, said, "Why, of course, you should go; they are all disciples."

I simply listened to all that they said. Now, there is an old widow (Prasannamayi) in our village whose opinion is respected because she is very virtuous and intelligent. I went to her at last and asked, "What do you say?" She replied, "Fancy! You will certainly go. They are disciples, as good as your sons. How can such a question arise? There can be no two opinions about your going." Hearing of this, others also consented. Then I came.'

Sometime in May, 1888, the Mother came to Balaram Babu's house in Calcutta. Either at this time or near about this, we get a profound insight into the inwardness and God-absorption of the Mother. That day, as she sat for meditation on the roof of Balaram Babu's house, she entered into samadhi. When she emerged from it, she said to Yogin-Ma, 'I saw, I was in a far-off place. All were treating me there with the utmost love. I became very beautiful. The Master was there, and with great tenderness they made me sit by his side. I can't describe the bliss that I enjoyed. When I regained my consciousness a little, I saw the body lying here. Then the thought came to me, "How can I enter into this ugly body?" I had not the least desire to resume it. At long last, I managed to get into it; and then consciousness returned to it.' It appears to us as though, the discord between the intrinsic divinity of the Mother and her physical vestures became intensely vivid through that vision, at the same time that she became more fully aware of her real identity and felt that through God's dispensation she had to work for the good of the world in and through such uninviting environment.

In a few days, the garden house of Nilambar Babu on the Ganges at Belur was engaged by the devotees, and the Holy Mother went there with Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and some monks as her companions and attendants. She stayed there for six months. Her meditativeness was as intense now as before. One day, as she sat in meditation on the roof with her two woman companions, she became merged

in deep *samadhi*, so that her companions, on rising from their seats, found her body stiff and motionless. After a long time she said while descending to the normal plane, 'O Yogen, where are my hands, where are my feet?' The companions, while pressing her hands and feet to make her conscious of them, said, 'Here, indeed, are your hands and here your feet.' Still it took quite a long time for her to regain normal consciousness. When the term of the lease expired, the Mother returned to Balaram Babu's house at the beginning of November, 1888, from where she started for Puri after a couple of days.

This pilgrimage attracted quite a number of devotees; and Swamis Brahmananda, Yogananda and Saradananda, as also Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma's mother, and Lakshmi Devi went with her. The coastal railroad had not yet been constructed; hence they went by steamer from Calcutta to Chandbali (7th November), from where they proceeded by a launch to Cuttack, and by cart to Puri. Arriving at Puri, they visited Lord Jagannatha immediately, for an inauspicious period would commence from the next day. Then the Holy Mother and the women went to live in a house of Balaram Babu, called the Kshetra-basir Math or a resort for the dwellers in the holy place; the monks had their own separate place. The Mother stayed here for a little more than two months, returning to Calcutta in the middle of January next year. We shall relate here some incidents of the Puri visit.

As the Master had never been to Puri, the Mother carried his picture under her cloth so as to show him Jagannatha by showing the deity to his picture; for she believed that 'the picture and its prototype were the same.' About Jagannatha she said, 'I saw Jagannatha as the best of all persons sitting on an altar of gems with myself serving Him as a handmaid.' At another time she said that she saw the god as Siva.[1] On her visit to the temple, she

1. There are divergent theories about the identity of the image. It seems that the temple changed hands and the deity too, was differently conceived.

was delighted to see the great concourse of pilgrims; and with tears of joy she thought within herself, 'Hey-day! good luck! so many people will be freed (through this vision of the Lord)!' But the next moment it occurred to to her, 'No, only those rare few who have no worldly desire will be freed.' When she shared her thought with Yogin-Ma, the latter, too, concurred.

At Puri the Mother's characteristic humility was revealed in bold relief. Govinda Shingari, the Panda[1] of Balaram Babu's family, thought that in keeping with the honour of that family a palanquin should be arranged for carrying their guru's wife to the temple. When he placed this proposal before the Mother, she said 'No, Govinda, you will walk in front as a guide and I shall follow you as a poor humble woman to visit Jagannatha.' It was thus that she visited the temple. She also visited all the noted places at Puri, and she spent long hours regularly in meditation at the temple of Lakshmi.

From Puri she returned to Calcutta on the 12th January, 1889; and the next day, she bathed in the Ganges at Nimtola. She visited the Kali temple at Kalighat on the 22nd. On the 5th February she went with Swamis Vivekananda, Saradananda, Yogananda and Premananda, as also Master Mahashaya, Sannyal Mahashaya and many others to Antpur, the birth-place of Swami Premananda. After spending about a week there, she left for Kamarpukur by a bullock-cart. Master Mahashaya and some others accompanied her.

Her stay at this time at Kamarpukur was almost as long as the first one. Then she came to Calcutta, and took up her residence on the banks of the Ganga at Belur in the rented house of Raju Gomasta. From there she went on the 5th March (1890) to Master Mahashaya's house at

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1. A brahmin who guides the pilgrims and officiates as their priest at a holy place.

Kambuliatola (Calcutta), from where she went on a pilgrimage to Gaya with the old Swami Advaitananda. After the passing away of his mother, the Master had asked the Holy Mother to go to Gaya to offer oblation at the well-known Vishnu-pada (Footprints of Vishnu). The Mother now carried out that command. She took this opportunity to visit Baidyanatha on the way, and from Gaya she went to Bodh Gaya also. On the completion of this pilgrimage, she returned to Master Mahashaya's house on the 2nd April.[1] Just then Balaram Babu lay gravely ill. The Mother remembered well his services to the Master and the latter's love for him; and, therefore, she shifted to his house to be at his bed-side during his last days. The great devout soul passed away on the 13th April, 1890.

A month later she moved over to a rented house on the Ganges at Ghushuri (Belur), near the local crematorium. When she was there, an irresistible desire to go out in quest of the Unknown was roused in Swami Vivekananda's heart, and he decided to leave the monastery and wander about the country for some time in quest of illumination. But he felt strongly inclined to seek the Mother's blessing before he started. Coming, therefore, to her one day in July, he made a long and reverential prostration, sang to her some devotional songs, and then expressed his heart's desire: 'Mother, if I can become a man in the true sense of the term, then only shall I return; otherwise this will be my last farewell.' Taken aback, the Mother said, 'You don't say so!' The Swami said, 'No, no, by your grace I shall soon come back.' The Mother could understand the depth of her son's aspiration, and to her divine vision appeared clearly the picture of his bright future; hence she blessed him heartily and asked him to return after enlightenment and fulfilment of his mission.

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1. The sequence of events from Puri onward, follows the unpublished memoirs of Master Mahashaya, with which the foot-note on p. 154 of *Shri Shri Mayer Katha*, part I, as also the account in it on pp. 317-18, are strikingly in accord.

Immensely inspired by her good wishes, Swamiji left for a tour of the holy places of India.

The Mother lived in that house till the month of Bhadra (August-September). Then she had to be taken to Saurindra Thakur's house at Baranagore across the river for treatment for dysentery from which she was suffering. The then Ramakrishna Math was not far from this house, so that it was easier for the monks to arrange for her comfort and medical care. After she became well she went to the house of Balaram Babu, preparatory to her departure for Jayrambati by way of Kamarpukur after the Durga worship (sometime in October). Of the events of her stay there,[1] the details available are not very clear, though an account of what happened during the Jagaddhatri worship that year (10th November, 1891) shows clearly that the Mother had then been fully established in her Motherhood, and that her divinity, too, had become acknowledged among intimate acquaintances. At that time Swami Saradananda went to Jayrambati to attend the worship of the deity, and with him went Sannyal Mahashaya, Haramohan Mitra, Kalikrishna (Swami Virajananda), Golap-Ma, and Yogin-Ma. They reached Burdwan by train and went from there to Kamarpukur by bullock-cart. After they had seen the Master's birth-place, they covered the rest of the way to Jayrambati on foot. The Mother's joy knew no bounds at the sight of her beloved children. She was ever busy attending to their needs. Every day she dressed the vegetables and prepared special dishes for them, and then served the food and sat by them to see that they were fully satisfied. Her affection touched the deepest chords of their hearts. She was more particularly attentive to the young novitiate, Kalikrishna, who

1. Some more accounts will be given in our chapter on *Girishchandra Ghosh*. A letter dated the 3rd Falguna, 1297 Bengali era, (or February, 1891), written to Master Mahashaya from Kamarpukur, reveals that the Mother had been there even earlier and had been hearing the *Gita* from her brother Abhay, while her niece Lakshmi Devi had gone to Dakshineswar for a dip in the Ganges.

was still in his teens. She received him as a veritable son and kissed him by touching his chin.[1] He ran errands for the elders and had free access everywhere. He had often to go to the inner apartments to fetch betels, tiffin, or fire for their tobacco pipes. As it is not customary to hand over fire directly to a son,[2] the Holy Mother placed the burning charcoal or cow-dung cake on the ground for him to pick it up with a pair of tongs.

Shyamasundari Devi was addressed by them as grandmother. She was simple and diligent; there was no end to her daily round of duties. Tending the cattle, feeding the labourers, husking paddy, and such other tasks closely followed one another; and yet she was all smiles for everyone—there was no sign of anger or annoyance. The Mother, also, was always at her side. Grandmother looked upon the devotees as her grandchildren for whose welfare she was extremely solicitous. The call 'grandma' pleased her as nothing else. This natural love for the grandchildren continued all through her life; and even those who went to Jayrambati much later, had an unforgettable touch of her warm heart. Throughout the year she would be busy laying by things for her grandchildren and declaring, 'Mine is a family of God and His devotees.'

At that time grandmother narrated many incidents of the Master's life to her grandchildren Kalikrishna and others. One day Haridas Vairagi, a roving minstrel of Desra, came and sang to the tune of his violin:

> What a delightful news it is, O Uma (dear daughter)!
> (Dear me)! I hear from people—say if that is true,
> O Siva's wife—
> That you've got the name Annapurna (filling all with food) at Banaras,

1. The Bengali mothers touch the chins of their grown up children with the tips of their right hand fingers, and then kiss those fingers. The Holy Mother followed this custom in the case of very young disciples. The word kiss in this volume means this only.

2. A dead body is cremated by setting fire to it. Because of this evil association mothers do not directly hand over fire to their children.

O Aparna (Uma), when I married you (to Siva),
Siva went about begging for morsels.
Today what a delightful news I hear, O giver of fortune!
Are you the Goddess of the Universe seated at the left of the God of the Universe?

Mad and eccentric they called my naked one (Siva),
Abuses galore have I endured thereafter in houses innumerable;
Now sit door-keepers at the naked one's door, they say;
And Indra, Chandra, and Death get no interview.

Siva had the Himalayas as his abode;
Days there were when begging brought his daily food;
Now he rolls in Kubera's wealth.
Has fortune smiled on him by your good luck?

There's indeed more affluence now, methinks,
Else how is Gauri (Uma) so proud?
She opens not her eyes at her own son,
And turns her face at Radhika's (poet's) name.

The song was, so to say, an exact replica of the Mother's life; and so every one heard it with rapt attention. Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma who were in the inner apartment wanted to hear the song again, and it was sung again. When at last the beggar left with some presents, grandmother commented, 'Forsooth, my dears, in those days all called my son-in-law mad, cursed my Sarada's fortune, and flung many a hard word at me; so I felt like dying. And see today, what a number of boys and girls of good families are worshipping at Sarada's feet thinking her to be a goddess!'

In accordance with the custom of the family the worship of Jagad-dhatri continued for three days. The Mother was ever busy cooking and doing other works. But at the evening service every day she stood with folded hands before the Deity or fanned Her with the *chamara* (yak's tail). People from all around were fed on these days, and on two nights there were *yatras*.

Three days after the worship was over, Swami Saradananda and others were laid up with malaria. The Mother became greatly anxious and went on repeating,

'Mother gracious! What's in store? The boys are all suffering in their beds.' During her moments of leisure she stood at the door-way looking silently at her sons. Milk could not easily be had in that village; still she moved from door to door collecting it by ounces till she got enough for their diet. As soon as they recovered, they decided that, since their continued stay was so very taxing to the Mother, they had better start for Calcutta without further delay. But the Mother expostulated, 'You'll go only after fuller recovery and after gaining more strength.' Nevertheless, they started in bullock-carts on the appointed day. As they were leaving, the Mother looked on wistfully from the backdoor with tearful eyes. Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma, too, could not restrain their tears; and from Kalikrishna's eyes a few drops rolled down unawares. After they had gone some distance he looked back to find that the Mother had followed them and was standing on the bank of the Badujye-pukur with eyes fixed on them. The wheels of their carts crackled on till the Mother was totally out of sight. Kalikrishna kept on thinking all the way, 'Whoever could imagine from what one heard that the Mother is really such a mother, that she would take by storm one's heart and soul in this way and make one dearer than the dearest! I loved my own mother very fondly to be sure; but here is one who was and will be a mother for all lives past and future—one's own mother for all time.'

From the October of 1891 to the middle of 1893, i.e., for about two and a half years, the Mother stayed in the country-side; and then she came to live at Belur in the garden house of Nilambar Babu, where among others Swami Trigunatitananda attended to her needs. He was very mindful of his duties to the minutest detail. For instance, he used to spread a clean cloth below a *shephalika* (weeping nyctanthes) tree, so that the flowers dropping from it at night might not get spoiled by touching the ground. He then collected these together for the Mother to be used during her worship.

One of the foremost events of this period was the performance of the *panchatapa* (five-fire) austerity by the Mother. After the Master left the body, the Holy Mother's dislike for life became so very strong that though she performed her duties mechanically, she kept on thinking that as the Master was no longer in flesh and blood, her life was altogether a meaningless thing. She had no taste for anything, nor any liking for gossip. In order to remove that sorrow, the devotees took her to different places of pilgrimage. When she was at Banaras, there used to come to her a nun who hailed from Nepal and who was versed in diverse esoteric practices. Studying the Mother's mental condition she advised her saying, 'Mother, you undertake the *panchatapa*.' That directed the Mother's thoughts to a new channel. It occurred to her that if the outer fires could be made unendurably hot, the internal fire might be subdued a little. Moreover, the belief began to grow in her that, after all, her life might not be quite useless; for in her ears were still ringing the words of the Master, 'You must not die; you have to stay on.' She was still in that vacillating frame of mind when supernormal visions or divine directions egged her on to undertake that austerity. At Kamarpukur she had seen with open eyes a girl of eleven or twelve years of age moving about her—sometimes in front of her and sometimes behind, with hair unkempt, and with an ochre cloth and a necklace of *rudraksha* beads on her person. It looked, as though the Mother's extreme abhorrence for the world consequent on the Master's demise had taken the form of that young nun. The Mother had another vision, also very frequently; a monk, with clean shaven face and head, suggested to her to undertake the *panchatapa*. At first she ignored such visions; but the Sannyasi (monk) persisted in his advice, till at last the desire for *panchatapa* became active in her mind during her stay at Belur. She did not know what it meant actually; and hence she consulted Yogin-Ma, who said encouragingly that she too would undertake it.

Arrangements were accordingly made for both of them. The roof of the one-storeyed portion of their house was covered with earth, and over this at intervals of about seven and a half feet (five cubits) four big fires were set ablaze in a square with cow-dung cakes, and overhead was the fiery summer sun. The Mother bathed in the Ganges and then came to the fires, the sight of which filled her with some dismay. But Yogin-Ma cheered her saying, 'Get in Mother, why are you afraid?' So with a silent prayer to the Master she got in, and Yogin-Ma sat by her. Once she was there, it seemed as though the fire had lost its heat. Meditation and *japa* continued within the circle of fires, till the morning sun slowly reached the zenith, poured down its scorching rays awhile, and then as slowly sank below the western horizon. The Mother and Yogin-Ma then came out. This went on for seven days till the scarced skin of the body looked quite black. The mental fire was then appeased a little; and the ochre-clothed girl departed for ever.

The Mother stood the terrible fiery ordeal. But when speaking of this incident in later days, she did not seem to attach any great importance to it. For instance, when a devotee asked, 'What's the need of austerity?' The Mother answered, 'Penance is necessary. Even Parvati did it for Siva. These are undertaken for the good of the people. Otherwise they will say, "Why, she eats, drinks, and lives just like any other person." As for *panchatapa* and such other things, these are feminine practices, just like the observance of vows, you know. The Master undertook all kinds of practices. He used to say, "I have made the die; you now shape your metal on them."' An intimate devotee asked, 'Where is the need for your doing so much penance?' The Mother replied, 'For the sake of you all, my son. How can the boys do so much? Hence I have to.'

The *panchatapa* might have mitigated to some extent the internal grief; but still the need for continuing in the body

was not becoming quite obvious to her. That conviction, too, was not long in coming as the result of a unique vision. It was a full moon night. The bright moonbeams were dancing on the white ripples of the Ganges like molten silver. The Mother came out to the head of the steps leading to the water to enjoy that beauty without any other thought in her mind. Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna emerged from behind and rushed down by her into the river, and his body of pure spirit got dissolved in the holy waters of the river, which has been washing away the sins of millions of people for ages. The sight made the Mother's hair stand on end. Dumbfounded, she kept her eyes fixed there, when all of a sudden, Swami Vivekananda burst upon the view from nowhere and shouting with elation, 'Glory unto Ramakrishna' went on spirinkling handfuls of that water over the millions of people standing around, who, before her very eyes, became freed from this world at the very touch of that water. The vision was so vivid and life-like, that for days together she could not step into the Ganges for bathing for fear of touching the Master's divine body with her feet. This transcendent vision had another effect; it impressed on her mind indelibly and for ever the true meaning of the new avatar's life; and from a consideration of its implication she came to believe that she had an important part to play in fulfilling his mission.

The intense desire for doing good that was thus taking shape in the Mother's mind through various visions and thoughts, expressed itself in its full beauty in this very house through a touching incident. Nag Mahashaya[1] believed the Mother to be none other than the Mother of the Universe. The day that he came to the Mother's house, happened to be the eleventh day of the moon when orthodox Hindus do not eat rice, curries, lentil soups, etc., but take other and lighter things according to convenience. The Mother had sat for her scanty repast when the maid-servant

1. Durgacharan Nag, a devotee of the Master.

announced, ' Mother, who is Nag Mahashaya? He is bowing down to you; but he is striking his head so hard (against the pavement) that, methinks, it will bleed. Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) entreats him so earnestly from behind to stop, but there's no answer, as though he is unconscious. Is he mad, Mother? ' In those days men devotees were not allowed to appear directly before the Mother but they bowed by touching the steps with their heads, and the maidservant went in to announce, ' Mother, they are saluting you.' On the present day no sooner the Mother heard about this self-forgetful devotee, than filled with affection she said to the woman, ' My dear, ask Yogen (Swami Yogananda) to send him here.' When Yogananda himself led Nag Mahashay by his hand to the Mother's presence, she noticed that his forehead was swollen, his eyes full of tears, and his steps unsteady. Because of his tears he could not see the Mother; it was as though he was no longer in the conscious world. The Mother was so much moved by this sight that she forgot her natural shyness and taking hold of the hand of her devout son made him sit by her. Nag Mahashaya was still crying, ' Mother, Mother '—as though in a state of delirium, and yet he was otherwise so peaceful and unobtrusive! The Mother wiped away his tears. There were the articles of food in front—roots, fruits, and sweets. The Mother ate a little and with her own hand put some of these into Nag Mahashaya's mouth. His mind, however, was then so completely indrawn that he could not eat these, but went on repeating as before, ' Mother, Mother! ' and sat holding her feet with both hands. The other women suggested, ' Mother, your meal is being spoiled. Let us ask Maharaj (Yogananda) to take him away. But the Mother replied, ' Let him alone! Let him calm down a little.' The Mother patted his head and body and uttered in his ears the name of the Master for some time; and then only he came round. The Mother now resumed her meal and went on feeding Nag Mahashaya, too, like a child. When he was being led

down after the meal, he kept on telling the Mother, 'Not I, not I; but you, you.' The Mother drew the attention of those present there to this and remarked, 'Look what perfect wisdom!' Overpowered with the joy of receiving food from the Mother's own hand, Nag Mahashaya said further, 'Mother is kinder than Father (Master), Mother is kinder than Father.' The Mother loved this son of hers very deeply and had the confidence that he could do everything for her.

There is another example of the Mother's affectionate dealings with Nag Mahashaya, which belongs to another period of time, and most probably to a different place, but is being introduced here for convenience of treatment. Putting on a dirty and worn out piece of cloth and with a basket of mangoes from his own garden on his head, Nag Mahashaya came to the Mother's house. The mangoes were of a special quality and some of them were marked with lime. At the Mother's house he went on moving about with the basket on his head. He would not give it to anybody, nor would he speak. At last Swami Yogananda sent word: 'Tell Mother that Nag Mahashaya has come with mangoes; he says nothing nor does he hand it over to anybody.' The Mother on hearing this said, 'Send him here.' Nag Mahashaya came with the basket on head and when a Brahmachari took it down, he made his obeisance at the Mother's feet, who noticed that he was as unconscious as on the previous occasion. He was repeating the name of the Master and while calling on the Mother tears were rolling down his chest. As the Master's worship had not been finished, some of the mangoes were cut and offered to him. When, after the worship, Yogin-Ma gave to the Mother on a leaf a few mango pieces, she took some of them and told Golap-Ma, 'Bring another *sal* leaf.' On that leaf she placed some of the pieces and asked Nag Mahashaya to eat them. But who was to do so? He had no physical sense; the hands were as good as paralysed. The Mother took hold of his hand and entreated him to

eat, but he simply took a piece and began rubbing it on his head. Helplessly the Mother had to ask some one to come up and lead him down. There he kept on striking his head on the steps till the forehead became swollen, and at long last, when consciousness returned, he left for home without partaking of the consecrated food.

When the Mother was living on the top of a godown near the Ganges in Calcutta, Nag Mahashaya visited her there. She gave him some *prasada* on a *sal* leaf. Through an intensity of devotion he looked upon everything touched by the sacred *prasada* as *prasada* itself and gulped down the leaf also. On another occasion the Mother gave him a piece of cloth, which he considered too sacred to be dishonoured by wearing; and so he tied it on his head as a turban. The Mother's affection for Nag Mahashaya found expression in a hundred ways even after his demise. A devotee one day noticed on entering the Mother's bedroom that she had hung up on the walls the pictures of Swami Vivekananda, Girishchandra Ghosh, and Nag Mahashaya, each of which she approached one after the other, wiped with a piece of cloth, put a mark of sandal paste, and then patted it with her hand. Last of all she said, keeping her eyes on Nag Mahashaya's picture, 'Quite a number of devotees come; but not another like this one.'

After passing some months at the garden house of Nilambar Babu, the Mother, most probably, went to Jayrambati. Then, when in the month of Paush (December-January) 1893–94, Balaram Babu's daughter Bhuvanmohini died, her mother Krishnabhavini Devi became so stricken with grief and so emaciated through disease that she had to be sent out for a change to Kailwar, about eighteen miles east of Arrah, in Bihar. But Krishnabhavani Devi agreed to go on condition that the Holy Mother would be with her. Accordingly, the Mother came to Calcutta in the beginning of 1894 and left for Kailwar with Krishnabhavani and her mother, as also Golap-Ma, Swamis Saradananda, Yogananda, and Trigunatitananda, and Swami Yogananda's

father Sri Navinchandra Chaudhury. They stayed there for two months. At Kailwar the Mother was delighted to see the wild deer moving in formation like a triangle and shooting away like arrows at the slightest sense of fear. She also noticed a strange device of the local people. Lest the jackals should drink of the date juice from the pots hung from the small palms, they hid themselves in pits in the ground, covering their heads with earthen vessels, and when the jackals approached, they drove them away by raising a cry.

After Kailwar the Mother was again at Jayrambati, where she, as also her mother fell ill, and Akshayakumar Sen, a devotee of the Master, called in a physician for their treatment. Then she came to stay at Belur till she was invited by Matangini Devi, mother of Swami Premananda and Krishnabhavini Devi, to be present at their home at Antpur where they were restarting the worship of Durga after a lapse of several years. They were all overjoyed to have her in their midst, and along with her Sri Shantiram Ghosh (brother of Swami Premananda) Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and Saradananda. After the celebrations, the Mother left for Jayrambati (October, 1894).

She returned to Calcutta in the beginning (probably February) of 1895. The desire again rose in her mind to go on a pilgrimage to North India. Accordingly, she had her mother and some of her brothers brought to Calcutta, and with them all, as well as Swami Yogananda, Golap-Ma, and Yogin-Ma, she left for Banaras and Vrindaban. At the latter place, they stayed for about two months (middle of February to middle of April); and then they came back to Calcutta, from where her relatives left for Jayrambati. But she spent a month at the Colootola house of Master Mahashaya, after which she went to Jayrambati by way of Kamarpukur (13th May, 1895).[1]

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1. On page 319 of *Shri Shri Mayer Katha*, part I, we read, 'Returning from there (Vrindavan), the Mother lived at the Colootola house of Master

From Vrindavan, the Mother had brought a small image of Gopala (Baby Krishna), which lay at her Jayrambati house without any worship. One day, as the Mother lay on her cot, she saw Gopala crawling to the cot and saying, 'You brought me here, but have shelved me away—you don't give me any food, you don't worship. If you don't worship me, none will.' The Mother got up at once, brought out Gopala from where he was and kissed him by touching his chin with her hand, and after offering him some flowers placed him near the Master's picture. From that day Gopala never again missed his daily worship along with the Master's. We have noted that during her stay in the village, the Mother spent some time at Kamarpukur also. Thus in November, 1895, she was there with Golap-Ma who suffered then from malaria.

We next meet the Holy Mother in Calcutta during the marriage of Sri Ramakrishna Bose, son of Balaram Babu, which took place in the second week of May (27th Vaishakh), 1896. As Balaram Babu's house was rather crowded with guests, she was accommodated in the house of Sri Sharat Sarkar, a young devotee of the Master. When the Mother was there, one day, a letter from Swami Vivekananda, urging all to take up the service of Narayana in all beings, was read to her; and she remarked, 'Naren (Vivekananda) is an instrument of Thakur (the Master) who makes him write these words for inspiring his children and devotees for doing his work, for doing good to all in the world. What Naren writes is true and must be fulfilled hereafter.' Referring to this stay of the Mother in the house of Sharat Sarkar, his friends and others would say, 'Sharat, you have performed Durga worship for about a month, while people do it for three days only. Whereas they worship a clay image, you have worshipped a living image of the Divine Mother".

Mahashaya for about a month.' In his unpublished memoirs, too, Master Mahashaya mentions that the Mother left for Jayrambati from his house at 52 Bhavani Datta Lane (Colootola).

After a month had been spent here she was accommodated in a rented house near the Ganges on the Sarkar Bari Lane, in Baghbazar (Calcutta). On the ground floor of the house was stocked turmeric, whence it was called the godown (Gudam-badi); the first and second floors were habitable. The topmost floor was allotted to the Mother and other women devotees. The Mother had a wide view of the Ganges from there. On the lower floor lived Swamis Brahmananda, and Yogananda, and a few other monks who attended to the Mother's needs. The Mother lived here for some five or six months, and then left for the village after the worship of Kali in November. During her next visit, which came off in the second quarter of 1898, she lived at 10/2 Bosepara Lane, Baghbazar.

15

HER BURDEN-BEARERS

The period of the Mother's stay at 10/2 Bosepara Lane is important in more than one sense. From the second quarter of the year she had been living there. And Swami Yogananda was also there as her attendant. Swami Trigunatitananda went there whenever he could spare time from his duties in connection with the Bengali periodical *Udbodhan*. Some others, also, lived in the house now and then.

In the previous year Swami Vivekananda had returned from America to Calcutta (27th February, 1897). And after a contract had been entered into on the 3rd February, 1898, for the purchase of a plot of land on the Ganges at Belur for the permanent location of the Ramakrishna Math, the monastery had been shifted temporarily from Alambazar to Nilambar Babu's garden for carrying on the building work on the new land. When the actual construction began in April under the able supervision of Swami Vijnanananda, the Holy Mother was one day brought in a boat to the monastery. She was accompanied by Swami Yogananda, Brahmachari Krishnalal (Swami Dhirananda), and Golap-Ma. As soon as the boat touched the landing stairs, a conch was blown to announce the auspicious event; and when the Mother alighted, the monks washed her feet and with extreme veneration led her to the verandah of the shrine, where she sat, while the monks fanned her to give her relief from the heat of the day. After all had bowed down to her, she entered the shrine to worship the Master; this over, she offered him food and laid him to rest. She herself took some rest after lunch and at four in the afternoon started for the boat with her companions. Just then Brahmachari Krishnalal carried the earnest request of Swami Brahmananda, 'May the Mother condescend to tread on the new land of the Math before she departs.' Accordingly, the Mother went

to the land by the boat, while Swami Yogananda walked to it. Sister Nivedita, Mrs. Ole Bull, and Miss MacLeod, who were then staying in a house there, came out to greet the Mother and show her round. How delighted was the Mother to see her dream of having a permanent monastery on its way to fulfilment! After she had seen all, she said with joy, 'At long last the boys have a place to lay their heads in — the Master has cast his benign look (on them) after such a long time!' At the end, she got into the boat and started for Calcutta.

Swami Vivekananda came back to the Math in October, 1898, after his visit to Amarnath and Kshirbhavani in Kashmir. He was in bad health then. On the second day of the Durga worship he, along with Swamis Brahmananda, Prakashananda and Vimalananda, went to Baghbazar to make his obeisance at the feet of the Mother. There he fell prostrate before her. The Mother stood at a corner, covering her entire body with a wrapper. Her talks with the Swami were in a very low tone, so that they had to be repeated more distinctly by Brahmachari Krishnalal. When the Swami prostrated himself, the Mother blessed him by touching his head with her right hand. Then this loving and world-famous son of the Mother complained with an air of petulance, 'Such indeed is your Master, Mother! Just because a Fakir's disciple in Kashmir used to visit me, the Fakir cursed me saying, "He shall have to leave this place in three days with stomach trouble." And sure enough, it happened just as he had said — I had to flee away helter-skelter! Your Master could do nothing whatsoever.' The Mother had her answer communicated, 'It's an occult science. One can't but bow down before it, my boy! They didn't, in fact, come to destroy. Our Master heeded even such things as the cry of a lizard or a sneeze.[1] And we hear that Sankar-

1. At these sounds one must stop doing anything, as they augur evil.

acharya too, allowed his body to be afflicted with a disease.[1] It is known to you that as the result of a curse from his cousin Haladhari, the Master had haemorrhage from his mouth. Your suffering from disease is the same as the Master suffering from it.' The Swami, still in a mood of irascibility, protested that he was not ready to accept all this despite the Mother's argument, and in fact the Master was nothing. Then the Mother answered with some amusement, 'Is there any other way out, my son? For, sure enough, you are tied to his hem-string.' The Swami knew the truth of this too well, and so he silently bowed down and took leave with tearful eyes.

Sister Nivedita, after returning from Kashmir, took up her residence with the Mother who was very kind to her and treated her like a daughter. But she soon realized that the stay of a foreigner in a brahmin family could complicate matters for the Mother's relations who had to move admist orthodox people; and hence, though the Mother said nothing, she, of her own accord, shifted to another house on the same lane.

Soon came the day (12th November, 1898) of the annual Kali worship, and the monks at the Belur Math made preparations for the purpose. The Mother went there in the morning with the picture of the Master which she worshipped daily. After alighting from the boat at the monastery at Nilambar Babu's garden house, she proceeded on foot to the newly bought land and after cleaning a spot with her own hands, worshipped the Master there. At noon she returned to the monastery where she took some *prasada*. In the afternoon, Sister Nivedita took her along with Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda, and Saradananda to 16 Bosepara Lane, where the Sister's Girls' School was formally declared open by the Mother.

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1. At Kamakhya a Tantrika was defeated in argument by Sankara; and in order to avenge this defeat the Tantrika laid a curse on him that he should get fistula, and he did get it.

Either during this or some other visit of the Mother to the Math land, Swami Vivekananda went round with her and said, 'This is your own place, Mother; and here you move about at ease.' The Mother said afterwards about this land, 'Of a truth, I always saw as though the Master lived on the land on the other side of the Ganges — in a cottage just where the present monastery and plantain trees are.' This vision referred to a time when the land had not been purchased.

On the completion of the new buildings, Swami Vivekananda, on the 9th December, 1898, carried on his own shoulders the vessel containing the Master's ashes, placed it on a big altar on the newly bought land and performed worship and *homa* duly. Some monks began to reside there from that very day, while the whole monastery shifted to the new buildings on the 2nd January of the following year. The Mother had prayed for a lasting habitation for her sons; and here it was.

This happiness, was however, unfortunately marred by a very sad event in a few months. Even while the Sister Nivedita School and the Belur Math were becoming accomplished facts and the devotees of the Master had reason to be proud, Swami Yogananda lay seriously ill at the Mother's rented house in Calcutta. Two physicians of repute, Dr. Bepinbehari Ghosh and Dr. Shashibhushan Ghosh, both devotees of the Master, were in attendance, and both were unanimous that the intestines were dangerously out of order. As the allopathic treatment produced no result, Kavirajas were called in to try the indigenous system. The monks from the Belur Math were constantly in attendance. In fact, every possible step was taken for his recovery; but the patient's condition deteriorated. The Mother was so very anxious for him that any apparent alleviation of the sufferings of Yogananda produced a corresponding elation in her, and she too felt healthier; but as he lost more and more weight she too, became correspondingly emaciated. For the proper nursing of the

patient the Mother suggested at this time that his wife should be brought there; but Swami Yogananda objected vehemently. The Mother still brought her to him and said, 'Give her some instruction.' The monk Yogananda, however, who was free from all worldly shackles and whose vision was more than ever bent towards Infinity, said with extreme unconcern, 'As to that, you know best.' As the last day approached, one of the Mother's attendants went upstairs to give her flowers for worship, when he saw her sitting with her face to the west and legs outstretched, while tears rolled down her cheeks. He tried to console her as best as he could but the Mother asked in desperation, 'My boy, what will happen to my son Yogen?' The attendant tried to impress on her that there was really no cause for anxiety, for Swami Yogananda would recover. Still she said, 'But, my boy, I have seen it...At dawn I saw that the Master had come to take him.' And she burst into tears. Then regaining a little composure she added, 'Don't you tell anybody. Such things are not to be talked about.'

At noon of the 28th March, the condition of the patient became worse and at three in the afternoon his face shone with a celestial light. Brahmachari Krishnalal, who sat at his head, now began weeping; and the Mother, who was upstairs and whose ears were alert, caught the sound; and she too burst forth into a wail. An attendant, surprised at this piteous wailing of the Mother, who was otherwise so calm and collected, ran immediately upstairs to compose her with entreaties by taking hold of her feet; but she brushed him aside saying, 'Off with you! My Yogen has left me — who will now look after me?' Everything was over soon. The Mother next day heaved a long sigh and said, 'A brick has slipped off the structure; now the whole thing will come down.'

From the subsequent talks and action of the Mother we can have an idea of the depth of her affection for this son of hers, and the extent of her dependence on him. In her reminiscent moods she said at different times, 'Nobody

loves me as Yogen did. If anybody gave him so much as eight annas, he kept it by saying, "Mother will go out on pilgrimages, etc., and then she will need it." He was always by my side. Because he lived in the midst of women, the boys taunted him. Yogen told me, "Mother you will call me 'Yoga'." Yogen passed away saying, "Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and the Master came to take me, Mother."...The Master used to speak of him as Arjuna... Sarat (Swami Saradananda) and Yogen — these two belong to my inner circle.'

It should be mentioned here that the Mother referred to Swamis Yogananda and Saradananda as her 'burden-bearers'. She said, 'I don't see any one who can now carry my burden (i.e., shoulder my responsibilities). Yogen was there. And there is Krishnalal too, — calm and quiet —a disciple of Yogen.' On another occasion she said, 'Boy-Yogen served me very well indeed, none else can do the like of it. Only Sarat is able to render such service. Sarat has been doing so after boy-Yogen. My child, it is extremely difficult to shoulder my responsibilities. None other than Sarat will be able to carry my burden.' Instances of Swami Saradananda's incomparable service will be plentiful as we proceed. But now we are dealing with Swami Yogananda's.

We have referred to the worship of Jagad-dhatri at the Mother's paternal home. Her family was poor and there were not enough members to assist in the preparations for the worship. Consequently, the Mother had to go to Jayrambati at that time for scouring the metal vessels and such other tasks. To remove this difficulty Swami Yogananda purchased wooden vessels with some money he had collected and said to her, 'Mother, you won't have to go for scouring the vessels.'

Every memory of Yogananda was dear to the Mother. The Swami had got a quilt made for her. Finding it worn out after long use, she handed it over one day to her disciple Bibhutibhushan Ghosh to have it renewed, by

carding the cotton and changing the cover. But soon the thought occurred to her that if the quilt was thus renewed then the memory of her beloved son might be hurt. That was too sad to contemplate and so she corrected herself and said, 'No, Bibhuti, you need not take the quilt. Yogen gave it to me — the very sight of it reminds me of him.'

Once on coming to the Belur Math during the Durga worship, the Mother saw an oil-painting of Swami Yogananda hung on the wall outside the Master's shrine. She gazed at it intently for a considerable time and then entered the shrine to bow down before the Master as usual; but from there she came out so quickly that to the people present there it seemed as though her mind was engaged in so intense a search after her son in some unseen domain that it refused to be fixed to this world.

The Mother regarded Swami Yogananda as belonging to that galaxy of divine souls who are known as Ishwarakotis, or as Sri Krishna's companion Arjuna, who came down again with Sri Ramakrishna to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. He served the Mother for more than twelve long years (autumn of 1886 to spring of 1899) with unswerving devotion.

Swami Yogananda's successor was selected long before he left his field. Swami Saradananda once said to him, "Yogin, I can't really follow all that Naren (Swami Vivekananda) says. In what a diversity of moods he talks! Whatever standpoint he takes up, he makes so much of it that the others pale into insignificance.' Yogananda said, "I tell you one thing, Sarat, you cling to the Mother; whatever she says will be right.' Not stopping there, he took him to the Mother. And in this way Saradananda gradually got the privilege of serving the Mother which he did in the ideal way and became immortal in the annals of the Ramakrishna movement. But he did not step into Swami Yogananda's shoes immediately after the latter's passing away. He was then in Western India, collecting

money under the instructions of Swami Vivekananda. On his return to the Math, he became busy with multifarious duties. Hence Brahmachari Krishnalal continued as her attendant for some time, while Swami Trigunatitananda, who spent the whole day outside in connection with the fortnightly periodical *Udbodhan*, stayed in the Mother's house at night and had in his hands the general direction of her household. In fact, he was the Mother's chief attendant till at the end of 1902 he left for U. S. A. Needless to say that he discharged his duties faithfully.

A little over four months after the passing of Swami Yogananda, her youngest brother Abhay succumbed to an attack of cholera. Prasanna and Varada, two other brothers of the Mother, then lived at Chorebagan in Calcutta by turns and earned their livelihood by priesthood. Abhay, too, was then with them. He was studying medicine after passing the Entrance Examination. And just as he had finished his course at Campbell Medical School and was waiting for the result of the final examination, he was attacked by that fell disease. The Mother went to see him in a palanquin, and Swamis Saradananda and Prakashananda nursed him. But destiny was inexorable and Abhay passed away. The Mother's sorrow was so deep and abiding that in later days she used to speak of her little nephews, 'May these live long, even though they may not be educated.' When her sisters-in-law protested, 'Is that really the way you should bless any one?' she used to reply with a sad countenance, 'Yes, dear, yes! What do you know? I brought up Abhay, and he is gone!'

After Abhay's demise, the Mother could find little solace in Calcutta; and hence she left for her village by way of Burdwan. After crossing the river Damodar, she got into a cart and Swami Trigunatitananda walked in front with a staff on his shoulder like a bodyguard. When it was the third watch of the night, the Swami suddenly saw that a portion of the road had been washed away by a flood, so that if the cart passed over the

depression it might overturn or get a jolt, as a consequence of which the Mother's sleep might be disturbed or she might even be hurt. Without losing any time, he lay down on the depression and ordered the cart to be driven over his strong muscular body. Fortunately, the Mother woke up and looking ahead understood the whole situation with the help of the moonlight. She got down at once and walked over the place, reproving Trigunatitananda for his rash act.

Here is another instance of Swami Trigunatitananda's devotion to the Mother. Yogin-Ma once asked him to obtain from the market some hot chillies for the Mother. The Swami wanted to get the best, that is, hottest, ones and therefore, walked from Baghbazar to Burrabazar, a distance of about three miles, tasting the chillies at every market till he got the best at the latter place! But by then his tongue had become swollen. Even in America, he remembered her and remitted some money every month to her.

Before we close the chapter we must add for the information of the readers that though the monks looked after the needs and comforts of the Mother all along after the Master's passing away, the services of Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma were not inconsiderable. They often lived with the Mother not only in Calcutta, but also at Jayrambati. Charmed with their devotion the Mother said subsequently, 'I can't stay in Calcutta unless Golap and Yogin are there.'

16

A SELF-IMPOSED LIMITATION

When the Mother sat by uncle Abhay's death-bed holding his head on her lap, caressing it softly with extreme affection, Abhay kept his eyes fixed on his sister's and said in an appealing voice, 'Sister, they are all left behind; do have an eye on them.' The Mother accepted that duty tacitly. Uncle Abhay's wife Surabala was then in the family way and was living at her father's house. She was born to misery; her mother died in her childhood and she was brought up by her mother's mother and sister. Her grandmother died soon after Abhay. On arrival at Jayrambati, the Mother remembered Abhay's request and had Surabala brought to her. A few days later, Surabala's aunt too, passed away. Unable to withstand so many bereavements in quick succession, Surabala's mind lost its balance; and while still in that state of mental aberration, she gave birth on the 26th January, 1900, to a daughter, who was named Radharani, or in short, Radhu or Radhi. The Mother's worry was great, for Surabala could not in her then state be trusted to take due care of the child. Fortunately, however, a woman named Kusumkumari came to Jayrambati next month with Swami Achalananda of Banaras. She willingly took upon herself the care of the child and stayed on at Jayrambati till the month of Jyeshtha (May-June).

It was circumstances that forced the Mother to choose Jayrambati as her chief place of residence, though it was not quite a happy choice. By divine dispensation her household worries went on multiplying all the time. We have used the phrase 'divine dispensation' with due deliberation — it is not a production of our imagination. With a view to making his incarnation a success, the Master had been forging around the Mother various fetters of love, the strongest of which was Radhu. After the Master's passing away, the Mother's mind found

no solace anywhere. It kept on groping in a dark vacuum as it were, and she prayed, 'Why should I live any longer?' Just then she had the vision of a girl of ten or twelve years of age, with a red cloth on her body, frolicking about in front of her. The Master pointed to the girl and said, 'Let this be your main-stay. What a number of boys will now come to you!' With this he disappeared, and the girl too was nowhere to be seen. Long after that, the Mother was one day sitting in her brother's house at Jayrambati. Surabala was then unmistakably insane. She went in front holding under her arms some patched clothes which brushed the ground behind, and she was followed by her daughter Radhu at a distance, crawling and crying. The sight sent a dart of horror through the Mother's mind, who thought, 'Of a truth, who else will look after this child if I don't? She has no father, and her mother is mad.' She ran and lifted the child into her arms, and the Master immediately appeared to her to say, 'This is that girl; hold on to her; this is *yoga-maya*.'

This fact is borne out by the Mother's own references to it at different times. Her fondness for Radhu gave rise to doubts in critical observers who often blurted out trenchant remarks. One devotee, for instance, asked, 'Mother, why are you so fond of her? You are uttering "Radhi, Radhi" day and night like any worldling. And yet you pay no attention to the many devotees that come to you. Such attachment! Is this good?' Such a question was nothing new to the Mother. She would answer modestly, 'We are women, we are like that.' But today she warmed up a little and said, 'Where can you get a parallel to this? Would you find out a second one like me? The fact is, the mind of those who meditate on the Supreme Reality becomes very sharp and pure, and whatever it takes hold of, it clasps with some might. This appears as attachment. When the lighting flashes, it is reflected on the sashes and not on the blinds.' On

another occasion she said, 'See! They say that I am lost in thoughts of Radhu, that I am greatly attached to her. If that bit of attachment were not there, then this body would not have survived the passing away of the Master. Is it not for his work that he has preserved this body by involving me in the thoughts of Radhu? When my mind is detached from her, this body will perish too.' And she said, 'This constant thought of Radhi that I have, is only a delusion which I have accepted for making living possible for me.' The meaning of such avowals is so palpably clear, that we need not mar their beauty by additional remarks.

Other reasons also might have contributed to the kind of background that was created for the unfoldment of the Mother's life. As some devotees who aspired after material welfare were scared away by the Master's cancer, thinking that it was useless to run after a man who had not himself transcended bodily shortcomings, so also God might have created round the Holy Mother an encrustation of apparent worldliness in order to keep away people who appreciate only exuberance of spirit but are blind to silent and hidden virtues. Furthermore, though the Master set an incomparable ideal for both monks and householders, yet the most valuable part of his life was spent outside family surroundings; and hence we lack here an abundance of examples of how a person, living in the midst of hundreds of daily worries, can yet rise higher through sheer force of will, character, and faith in God. The life of the Mother is woven with the warp and woof of various complicated domestic problems; and the events there are full of tears, troubles, and vexations, even from the worldly point of view. And yet she is not only always entirely above their degrading influence but her every movement is resplendent with a divine grace. This interfusion of divine and human elements makes the Mother's life instructive and its appeal irresistible to men who tread the wonted paths of the work-a-day world, and inspiring and illuminat-

ing to others who are in search of a higher ideal. And in particular, her life is of special significance to women who spend their lives with their families in a more real sense than men do. We shall come across these facts over and over again. For the present we are having a passing look at them.

To have an inkling of the many obstacles through which the Mother's love had to manifest itself, let us look at the conduct of her brothers. During the Mother's stay elsewhere, her brothers, the 'uncles', pestered her for monetary help or troubled her about family dissensions. When reading their letters out to her, somebody might remark, 'Give them plenty of money, Mother. Pray to the Master. Let them enjoy to their hearts' content, so that their hankering may cease.' To this she would reply, 'Can their craving ever cease? Nothing will stop them — not even if they are given all and more than they ask for. Will worldly people ever be satisfied? There are only tales of woe at their place. It's that Kele (Kali) who always cries for money. And following him, Prasanna too is now doing so. Varada never wants; he says, "Where can sister get money?" On another day she said about her exacting brothers with a shrug, 'They are crying themselves hoarse for money only, my son! — "Give us money, give us money." They never ask for knowledge and devotion even by accident. So let them have what they want.' Needless to say that through the Mother's grace they were having what they wanted.

From the above account the reader must not conclude that there was no finer element in the mental make-up of the uncles, or that they had no nobler aspiration. The great poet and dramatist Girishchandra Ghosh once commented that the uncles in their previous births had practised terrible penances even to the point of sacrificing their own heads; and that was why they got the Mother of the Universe as their sister. And from different events we can conclude that they were to some extent

conscious of her divinity, though it was so overlaid with worldly sentiments that it exerted no perceptible influence over their lives. In illustration of this, let us cite some examples, though they belong to a later period.

When the Mother was returning to Jayrambati after the worship of Durga in Girish Babu's house in 1907, she sent direction to her brothers to post some people with light and other equipment to receive them across the Amodar. But when she went there with her companions, there was no one to receive her. As a result, they had to ford the river somehow and reach Jayrambati in the dark. At dinner time a devotee remarked, 'Mother, have you noticed their lack of any sense of propriety? You were coming, but they did not send a single man to the riverside.' At this the Mother asked uncle Prasanna, 'I came here alone; why did you not send any one to the riverside? These sons of mine came; but you didn't send any man, nor did you yourself come.' 'Sister,' replied uncle Prasanna, 'I didn't send anybody for fear of Kali, lest he should say, "He is going there to ingratiate himself into sister's favour." Do I not understand how high you are and what rare souls these devotees are? I know everything; but I am helpless. The Lord has not granted me that power this time. Kindly bless me that I may get you as my sister in every life just as I have you in this; I don't want anything else.' 'Again in your house?' the Mother cut him short with a shrug. 'It's enough you had it so this time. Rama said, "May I never again be born in Kausalya's womb after my death." Among you again!'

Another day, uncle Prasanna argued with the Holy Mother, 'Sister' I heard it said that you appeared to some one in dream, gave him a *mantra*, and assured him also of his salvation. And you brought us up on your lap — should we be for ever what we are?' The Mother said in reply, 'It shall be as the Master will ordain. And mind you, how often Sri Krishna played with the cow-boys, frolicked with

them, and shared the same food with them; yet did they know who Krishna was?'

Not that the Mother was always so indifferent; she was ready to help these dear brothers of her and put hopes in their hearts for this world as also the next. Uncle Prasanna asked her once, 'Sister, we were born of the same womb; what shall be our lot?' The Mother said encouragingly, 'That's true to be sure; what fear need you have?'

In addition to these able but inconsiderate brothers there were the foolish but helpless nieces. We shall see, as we proceed, that the Mother had to shoulder the burden of some of these. And to crown all, there was Surabala, better known among the devotees as the mad aunt. Her aberrations sometimes reached such a pitch, that the Mother was heard to say, 'Maybe, I offered the *bel* leaves along with their thorns on Siva's head; and hence there is this thorn by my side.'

So long as the Mother lived at Jayrambati, she had to undergo strenuous physical labour. Times there were when she boiled bushels of paddy all the livelong day; and on succeeding days she was constantly at the husking machine making rice. And along with these were cooking, drawing water, scouring utensils and such other routine works. She was as diligent as her mother, by whose side she was always to be found. At one time the Mother had to work in the family so hard that her legs got swollen and she remarked, pointing this to others, 'Girish Babu was true when he said that these relatives had performed the severest of penances.'

Let us now turn back to the time of the Mother's stay at Jayrambati in 1900. As it was usual with her in those days to spend some time at Kamarpukur, during her stay in her village home, she went there this time as well but fell ill. We have it on the authority of the maidservant Sagarer Ma, of whom we wrote earlier, that the Mother had an attack of diarrhoea accompanied by vomiting,[1] and

1. This is how Sagarer Ma puts it in her simple way. In reality it was a

that the maid nursed her during the illness. Noticing the woman cleansing everything with her hands the Mother asked, 'Well, my dear, I don't think you feel any repulsion!' Sagarer Ma replied, 'Why should I be cleansing with the hand if I should feel so?' Information was sent to Jayrambati and Belur Math at the commencement of the attack. When the Mother came round a little, uncle Kali took her in a bullock-cart to Jayrambati. Two monks came from Belur Math after some three or four days, but the Mother declined to go to Calcutta. Pleased with the services of Sagarer Ma, the Holy Mother blessed her saying, 'You will never be in want of food or cloth.' And Sagarer Ma assured someone after recounting the incident, 'To tell you the truth, sir, I have never been in difficulty about food and cloth. The Master manages it for me.'

During the time of which we are writing, the Mother spent a year and a quarter at Jayrambati, and then came to Calcutta in October, 1900, with her uncle Nilmadhav, the mad aunt, Radhu, and Bhan-pisi, a woman acquaintance of the village of whom we have spoken earlier. In Calcutta, she lived for a year at 16-A Bosepara Lane, the Nivedita School having shifted from there to 17 Bosepara Lane.

Next year, Swami Vivekananda celebrated the annual worship of Durga at the Belur Math; and as he felt it imperative to have the Mother's presence at the worship, she was prevailed upon to come to Belur with some women devotees and stay at the garden house of Nilambar Babu for five days (18th to 22nd October, 1901). The worship was performed in the name of the Holy Mother; for Swami Vivekananda declared, 'We are all penniless beggars; the worship can't be in our names.' The Mother's attendant Brahmachari Krishnalal officiated as the priest under the

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case of cholera as we learn from the Belur Math Diary, which further records that Swami Trigunatitananda went to Jayrambati and that another monk went there in October to bring her back to Calcutta. She was present at the Belur Math on the 24th January, 1901, at the birthday anniversary of the Master.

direction of (*tantradharaka*) Ishwarchandra Chakravarty, father of Swami Ramakrishnananda. Through the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda offered twenty-five rupees to the *tantradharaka* for his priestly offices.

One night a thief made his way into the kitchen of the Mother's rented house in Calcutta by breaking the window on the narrow lane on which it looked. The mad aunt was in the habit of leaving her bed even while it was dark. As she approached the kitchen with a lamp in hand, she screamed and fainted at the sight of the man. Her consciousness returned through the effort of other inmates, but her brain became all the more deranged, so much so, that the Mother decided to leave with her for the village. Kusumkumari had taken charge of Radhu on the latter's arrival at Calcutta. Yogin-Ma and others, therefore, argued that such a woman should be engaged for looking after the child even at Jayrambati, and the devotees would defray the expenses; the Mother could thus stay on after sending home Surabala with her daughter. The Mother heard all that, but said nothing then. But when she sat for *japa* in the evening, an agonizing scene floated before her mind's eye which made her restless and made her reverse Yogin-Ma's plan. She saw that the girl was being subjected to such untold suffering owing to the craziness of her mother, that there was grave risk to her life at any moment. The Mother was so overpowered at the thought that she left her seat hurriedly and, communicating everything to Yogin-Ma, said definitely that it would not be possible for her to live in Calcutta separated from Radhu; for the good of the girl the Mother must be by her side at Jayrambati.

The Mother left for the village home with Surabala, Radhu, and Nilmadhav; but Bhanu-pisi stayed back for continuing her holy bath in the Ganges for some time more. The history of the next two years is a complete blank. But as we know that in those days the Mother usually went to Jayrambati before the Jagad-dhatri worship

(November) and came back to Calcutta at the end of winter, we may guess that she might have done so during these two years also.

In the month of Magha (January-February), 1904, when the Mother came to Calcutta, she took up her residence at 2/1 Baghbazar Street, which Swami Saradananda had engaged for her. She lived here for about a year and a half. For bringing her to Calcutta this time Swamis Saradananda and Virajananda, and Yogin-Ma went to Jayrambati by way of Burdwan and the Mother came along with Nilmadhav, Bhanu-pisi, and others by the same route. In Calcutta, Swami Saradananda lived in the same rented house with the Mother for taking care of her. From this time onward, Mrs. Ole Bull began to help her with regular remittances.

In the meantime the number of Mother's dependants had increased. Her uncle Nilmadhav, who had been a cook at the Paikpara Raj house, retired in old age on a small pension. But he was unmarried and had nobody to look after him. Hence he spent his last few years under the Mother's care. This was his second visit to Calcutta with her. The Mother took a personal interest in his comforts. If the devotees brought for her some good things—some untimely fruits—from the market she was sure to select the best among them for Nilmadhav. If any one protested, she explained, 'Dear son, how long, after all, will uncle live? It is best to have his desires fulfilled now. As for us, we shall live pretty long to have many things to eat.' In words and deeds this natural love flowed not only towards Nilmadhav, but also towards everyone who came into contact with her, of which we shall get plenty of illustrations in future.

During this stay at the Baghbazar house, the Mother continued to be in close relation with the Nivedita School; and the workers of the School, too, tried to serve her in all possible ways. Their carriage was at her disposal for going to the Ganges for bathing, for visiting the zoological garden,

the museum, the botanical garden, Kalighat, and other places of interest. She took these opportunities to walk a little to see if her legs could have some relief from the rheumatism which she had developed at Dakshineswar and which became her constant companion, so that she had to limp about.

During the Janmashtami (Krishna's birthday in August) celebration[1] the Mother went on invitation to Kankurgachhi along with her nieces Lakshmi, Nalini, and Radhu, as also Golap-Ma. The Mother was highly pleased with the celebration; but it strained her endurance to the utmost when at the request of Swami Yogavinode, the head of the monastery, she had to sit silently with her body covered all over with a cotton sheet according to her habit to accept the salutations of the devotees, which continued till six o'clock in the evening. She spoke of her discomfort to Golap-Ma only after returning home.

While still at this house she went one night to see the performance of *Vilvamangala* at the request of Girish Babu who himself played the role of the false spiritual aspirant. When that hypocrite told the woman Thakamani, that he would most assuredly teach her the love of Krishna, the Mother remarked with a derisive smile, 'It may as well not be done at this age.' And at the sight of the all-absorbing love of Vilvamangala she said, 'Aha! Aha!'

At this time Gopaler Ma, the very old woman devotee of the Master, lived in a room at the Nivedita School premises. The Mother revered her like a mother-in-law and sent food for her from her own kitchen. In the closing days, the old lady was very little conscious of anything except her rosary, for which she became restless if it was not at hand. She could not recognize anybody; but when the Mother came she said in a faint voice, 'Who's that? Is it you, daughter-in-law? Come.'

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1. There is an annual celebration at the place in commemoration of the interment of the holy ashes of the Master there on that day.

The Mother could not go to Jayrambati during the Jagad-dhatri worship (November) of 1904, because her household had become so big that moving about with all was an expensive affair. Moreover, she was improving in health and the devotees could not entertain the idea of her going to a malarious village just then. Nonetheless, the worship was so dear to her that she saw to the timely despatch of all the necessary things with her brother Varada and a devotee; and she got over her anxiety only after they returned to assure her that everything had been done properly. Then at the end of November the proposal for her going to Puri took shape.

The Bengal Nagpur Railway had by this time been completed. The Mother travelled in a reserved second-class compartment with Nilmadhv, the mad aunt, Golap-Ma, Sister Lakshmi, Radhu, Master Mahashaya's wife, Chunilal Babu's wife, and Kusumkumari. Swami Premananda and two devotees got into an inter class compartment. The train reached Puri in the morning, and the Mother with her relatives and women companions took residence in Kshetrabasir Math of the Boses, while Swami Premananda and others went to their second house near the sea called Shashi-niketana. The Mother's first duty at Puri was to go to the Jagannatha temple to have a look at the Lord. On subsequent days it was her daily task to visit the temple with others early morning and evening. One day there was arranged at her residence a *Katha* by a temple priest, which consisted in relating the story and glory of Jagannatha from the ancient books. On this occasion about fifty temple priests were sumptuously fed. The Holy Mother and others used to obtain on payment the consecrated food from the temple for their daily meals; the feast for the priests also was arranged similarly.

At Puri the Mother had a boil on her foot which gave her intense pain, and yet she did not allow it to be operated on. One day at the temple, somebody's foot touched

the boil, thereby causing excruciating pain to her. When Swami Premananda heard of this, he came the next day with a young doctor ostensibly to pay their obeisance to the Mother. She, as was her habit on such occasions, sat covering herself completely with a cotton sheet. The doctor now brought out his knife and, in the act of saluting by touching the feet, opened the boil and then begged her pardon saying, 'Mother, please don't be offended.' This unexpected move irritated the Mother a little at first. But when through proper dressing the pain subsided and the wound healed up in a trice, she heartly blessed her sons despite their dare-devilry.

A few days after this, the Mother wanted to bring her mother and a brother to Puri to give them an opportunity to see the Lord. A devotee was accordingly sent to Jayarambati. This had to be done without the mad aunt's knowledge, for she was too envious to brook anybody's sharing the Mother's affection or money which were to be monopolized by or kept in reserve for herself and her daughter. The devotee went via Vishnupur by train, the railway line on that side having been constructed a little earlier, and communicated the Mother's invitation to grandmother and uncle Kali who alone were expected to come. But at the news of the pilgrimage the number swelled till a big party[1] consisting of the grandmother, uncle Kali with his father-in-law, wife, and two sons, and a villager named Sitaram started by way of Garbeta. No sooner did they step into the Kshetrabasir Math than Surabala got into a frenzy, and went on castigating the Mother with all kinds of gestures and postures and doggerel verses.

It is an immemorial tradition at Puri that no caste distinction is observed so far as the *prasada* of Jagannatha is concerned, so much so, that *prasada* put into one's mouth by even a man of the lowest caste, at the Anandabazar

1. According to one authority all the sisters-in-law of the Mother went with the party.

within the temple precincts, may not be refused. The Mother showed her respect for this hoary custom by putting the *prasada* into the mouths of the devotees and asking them to put it into hers. While this merry ceremony was going on, Master Mahashaya and uncle Varada came there by chance from Calcutta, and they too joined in it.

All those who came from Jayrambati except the grandmother, left again in December. The Mother continued there for some time more. Her foot was now cured of the boil, the rheumatism too, was not acute, and the body was healthy. Therefore she moved about happily visiting the sacred places such as the kitchen of Jagannatha, Gundicha Bari, Lakshmi-jala, Narendra Sarovara, Govardhan Math, etc. She also circumambulated the Jagannatha temple and bathed twice in the sea. As her mind was cheerful at this time, she spoke of many anecdotes of the Master's life and of the Dakshineswar days. After spending some time thus in the salubrious, joyous, and holy atmosphere of Puri, she returned at the end of January to Calcutta where she stayed in the old rented house on the Baghbazar Street from where the grandmother left for home a little later.

17

BEREAVEMENTS

Nilmadhav suffered from asthma, which became unendurable sometimes. Soon after his return from Puri, the disease became so acute that it defied treatment, and he was bed-ridden. Unmindful of her own health, ease and rest, the Mother nursed him day and night, helped by some of her own attendants. But about two months after his return from Puri, his condition became very bad; and everyone was apprehensive of the worst at any moment. Once the Mother finished the worship of the Master and the offering of food to him expeditiously and came down. Then everybody pressed her to have her meal first, assuring that nothing would happen to her uncle in the meantime. The Mother hurried through her meal and then rushed to the patient. But now everyone sat silent around the patient. With great anxiety she cried out, 'Is my uncle no more?' Who could answer? The Mother's face then looked flushed with anger and repentance at the thought that she had failed to be there at the last moment just because she listened to the foolish persuasion of others. With extreme bitterness she said, 'Why did you send me to eat that dirty stuff? I missed a last look at my uncle!' And she began sobbing like a little helpless girl who had lost her father.

When she had composed herself a little, she asked an attendant to sit near the dead body while she herself went up to bring some leaves and flowers that had been offered to the Master. These she placed on the head and chest of the body and at both the places made *japa* with her hand. Then came the time for taking out the body for cremation. Of the bearers three were brahmins and another a non-brahmin. Golap-Ma noticed this unorthodox arrangement and drawing the Mother's attention said, 'Why should a sudra touch the dead body of a brahmin?' The Mother replied, 'Sudra? Devotees do not belong to any

caste.' The cremation took place duly at Kashi Mitra's Ghat; uncle Prasanna performed the last rites (April [?] 1905).

Uncle Prasanna then lived in a tiled cottage on the Simla Street. His eldest daughter Nalini had been married at a very early age, in the beginning of January, 1900, soon after the birth of Radhu. The bridegroom was Pramatha-nath Bhattacharya who belonged to Goghat in the Hooghly district of Bengal. With uncle Prasanna lived his wife, two daughters—Nalini and Maku—and Pramatha. Pramatha fell ill at this time and the disease was diagnosed as double pneumonia. The Mother kept herself informed about Pramatha's condition and often visited him.

The doctor in attendance was still a young man; but owing to some family misunderstanding he had become very morose and had lost all interest in life. To relieve his mind of extreme depression, he took morphia, frequently injecting it into his body at regular intervals. One day an attendant of the Mother, who was also a friend of the doctor, took him to the Mother who had that day gone on an invitation to Master Mahashaya's house at Jhamapukur along with some devotees. When the doctor and his friend arrived, she was in the shrine, where the two were directed to proceed. The doctor had come out only with a loin-cloth on a sudden call from his friend, thinking that something was wrong with Pramatha which required his immediate presence. He had also finished his lunch. Therefore when the friend proposed on the way that he should have his initiation from the Mother, he was rather surprised and pleaded his handicap. But the friend argued that it would be better to leave the whole matter in the hands of the Mother who best knew what formalities were essential before initiation. So the doctor entered the shrine and explained everything to the Mother. Still the Mother initiated him with a *mantra*. That produced a tremendous change in him. His whole face became radiant, the black tinge at the corners of his eyes disappeared, and his mind

was filled with a new light. That day he sat again at lunch with all the devotees, and forgetting caste prejudices and thinking himself to be as good a son of the Mother as any other, shared the same food with his friend, who belonged to a lower caste. Noticing this, the Mother remarked that they looked like two sons of the same mother, to which they added, 'That's true enough, Mother; for we are your sons.' The mental condition of the doctor improved so much in course of time that he got over his misunderstanding and mental suffering, set an example to other devotees by whole-heartedly serving the Mother and the monks of the Ramakrishna Math and helping in the work of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Some photographs of the Mother were taken during her residence at the Baghbazar house. Some of these were taken at the studio of Shri B. Datta of Chitpore Road, in the beginning of April, 1905. In one of these the Mother sits amidst Sister Lakshmi, Nalini, and Radhu. Swami Virajananda had another picture taken next month at Messrs. Van Dyke's on the Chowringhee in which the Mother sits with two plants in pots, one on either side. The picture of the Mother that is worshipped nowadays and is the most well-known was taken much earlier at the request of Mrs. Ole Bull in 1898, when the Mother lived in the Bosepara Lane house. At that time Sister Nivedita and Golap-Ma attended to the hair and clothes of the Mother according to their own taste.

Besides the doctor, another devotee named Sri Lalit-mohan Chatterji came to the Mother at this time. When he had become very intimate with the devotees and had known the Mother for some time, he became eager to be initiated by her. The Mother accordingly went to his house at Chhutarpara and gave the *mantra* to him and his wife. Lalit Babu also became a very sincere friend of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and made his own life a real success by serving the Mother in various ways.

Binodbehari Som, a student of the school where Master Mahashaya taught, was introduced by him to the Master who influenced him very much. But subsequently Som entered a theatre and took to drinking under the influence of which he talked desultorily when returning home at dead of night. He knew Swami Saradananda intimately and used to call him his *dost* (chum). His friends nick-named him Padmabinode. Now, Padmabinode, when passing by the Mother's house on his way home from the theatre, used to call on his *dost*, who, however, instructed everyone neither to respond nor to open the door, lest the Mother should be disturbed. One night, getting no answer from inside the house, Padmabinode started singing under the influence of liquor:

Get up, Mother gracious, and open the door;
Nothing is visible in the dark; and my heart ever throbs.
How often do I call on thee, O Tara (Kali) at the pitch of my voice!
And yet, though kind thou art forsooth, how thou behavest today!

Leaving thy child outside, thou sleepest inside;
While crying, 'Mother', 'Mother', am I reduced to skin and bone!
With proper pitch, tune, modulation, and cadence in all the three gamuts,

I call on thee so often; and still thou awakest not!
Maybe, thou hast turned thy face because of my engrossment in play.
Do thou look at me with upturned face, and I shan't go for play again.
Who but a Mother can bear the burden of such a wretched son?

The plaintive appeal of the song was irresistible. The blinds of the Mother's window went up at once, and then the window itself opened wide. Padmabinode noticed this and said with delight, 'Have you got up, Mother? Have you heard your son's call?. Since you've got up, take this

salute.' So saying he began to roll on the street. Then taking the dust from the street and putting it on his head he went away singing another tune,

> Keep Mother Shyama (Kali) carefully concealed in your heart;
> O mind, mayst thou and I only see Her, and none else.

and he repeated with some gusto,

> May I see Her, and *not* my *dost*.

Next day the Mother inquired about him, and learning everything, remarked, 'See, how firm is his conviction!' Padmabinode saw the Mother in that very manner at least once again. Next morning, when her attendants remonstrated that it was not proper for her to leave her bed at that unearthly hour, she replied, 'I can't contain myself at his call.'

Not long after, Padmabinode had a severe attack of dropsy, and he had to enter a hospital. During his last moments he expressed a desire to hear the Bengali *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which was read out to him. Tears trickled down the corners of his eyes as he heard the blessed words, and he passed away into eternal silence with the Master's name on his lips. The Mother heard all this and said with evident satisfaction, 'Why should this not be so? Was he not the Master's son? He was wallowing in mud, and has now returned to the lap to which he belonged.'

The Mother's return to Jayrambati was fixed for Jyeshtha (May-June) of 1905. This was her first journey by way of Vishnupur, where she and her party alighted from the train and had their lunch at a small wayside shop. Then Brahmachari Krishnalal who had accompanied them, started back for Calcutta, while the others got into four bullock-carts in the evening. Next morning they reached Kotulpur where they cooked and had their lunch at noon. Then the Mother and Radhu got into a palanquin which followed a shorter route to Jayrambati while the others continued in the carts by a longer one via Shihar.

The Mother had not been at Jayrambati during the Jagad-dhatri worship in the previous year; and hence the celebration this year was on a grander scale. Swami Saradananda sent there all the requisites, and the Mother added grace by her presence, and solemnity by her silent prayer.

One incident of this period shows how humble in spirit the Mother was, and yet how much esteemed she was by the local people. One day, when Sri Ganesh Ghoshal of Kamarpukur, who had been a class-mate of the Master, came to visit the Mother, she proceeded to bow down before him in all reverence; but Sri Ghoshal protested vehemently that it would be very harmful for a son to be saluted by his mother; and he himself fell down on his knees and saluted her.

At the end of 1905, Brahmachari Girija (later Swami Girijananda) went from Kankurgachhi to Jayrambati with his friend Batu Babu. He was a candidate for initiation and had obtained the Mother's permission previously. When they arrived at noon, the Mother said ruefully, 'My sons, my eldest sister-in-law[1] has got an attack of cholera. Just at noon she had cooked and fed the servants, and then suddenly fell into the grip of the disease.' Uncle Prasanna was then in Calcutta. There was neither medicine nor a doctor in the village. And so, in the course of twelve hours, the aunt died. Her daughters Nalini and Maku were still very young, and had none to look after them. The Mother who had given shelter to Radhu earlier, now took these two girls also under her care.

Brahmachari Girija now thought that under such tragic conditions, propriety demanded his keeping silent over the question of initiation; hence wishing to spend the time otherwise, he approached the Mother for her permission to go out for a visit to the Goddess Vishalakshi of Anur with whose name the childhood days of the Master

1. Rampriya Devi, first wife of uncle Prasanna.

were associated. The Mother said, 'With what expectation you must have come! Finish your bath and then come. Let me tell you something at least.' Most graciously she initiated him that very day. Batu Babu had no idea of taking any initiation just then; but the Mother blessed him also with a *mantra*.

And now came the month of Magha (January-February) of 1906, when the winter in Bengal is very cold. In the morning many sat on the terrace in front of the Mother's room. The previous day was the market day at Shiromanipur from where a woman had purchased vegetables for sale at Jayrambati. She came today, and grandmother Shyamasundari bought from her some greens and vegetables in exchange for paddy, mustard seeds, etc. Then the grandmother felt somewhat out of sorts. Nevertheless she helped in husking paddy. Soon she felt so weak that she lay down under the porch of uncle Kali's house and called out to an attendant of the Mother, 'Brother, I feel I am dying; there is a reeling sensation in the brain.' The attendant was alarmed and called the Mother there; but none could believe that the old lady was really going to breathe her last so soon. The Mother and the attendant did all they could under the circumstances. The old lady said, 'I have a desire for pumpkin curry.' The Mother assured her that she had not to worry about such a trifling thing, which would be arranged when she recovered. But grandmother said that the opportunity would never come and that for the time being she wanted a little water to drink. The Mother hurriedly brought some Ganges water and put it thrice into her mouth. Then the grandmother's body became motionless. The Mother knew that the last moment had come and so made *japa* with her hand on her head and breast. Then Shyamasundari Devi quietly passed away. It was nine o'clock in the morning. The whole household broke into a mourning wail. Uncle Varada, who was in the field, hurried back home on getting the news; and then the body was cremated on the bank of the Amodar.

The virtuous lady Shyamasundari Devi had been blessed by having had the Mother of the Universe in her womb. The Holy Mother once said, 'My father was a great devotee of Rama, and a generous soul. And how kind was my mother! That is why I was born in this house.'

In the beginning, grandmother, like others, used to think of Ramakrishna as an eccentric. But as days rolled on, this notion was replaced by an indescribable sentiment of affection mixed with awe. Grandmother loved the Master's children dearly. She stocked a good variety of rice and other eatables in anticipation of their coming; and said, 'My Sarada (Swami Trigunatitananda) may come any day, and Yogen (Swami Yogananda) may come; all these things are necessary.' She also added, 'So long as I am here, there's Brahma, there's Vishnu, there's the Universal Mother, there's Siva—all are here. When I depart, they too, will go. For who else can possibly take care of them? Mine is a household of God and godly people.' The grandmother's love embraced all the little children of the village. Even on the last day of her life, she played with her grandchildren—the little ones of the village—for a very long time.

Grandmother departed from the body fully conscious, with her blessed daughter Sarada by her side. But the Holy Mother wept bitterly like any mortal child. She was motherless now; in fact she had none else to whom she could look up for a bit of affection. Father, husband, uncle, mother,—all had left her one by one. And worse still, her Yogananda, on whom she could depend, was no more; and Abhay, whom she loved dearly, had come to an untimely end. The responsibility now thrust on her shoulders was indeed very heavy. Her sorrow today knew no bounds.

Yet the world has its own norm; and time runs its course relentlessly. Moreover, those who come to lead others possess on the one hand a most tender heart which is pained at the slightest touch of other people's misery,

and on the other hand a determination to discharge their duties manfully, without being deflected from the right course under the mightiest pressure. Hence, though the Mother could be overwhelmed with sorrow, she could not be blinded by it for ever. Moreover it devolved on her in particular to arrange for the *Shraddha* (solemn obsequies) of grandmother on the eleventh day; for her brothers depended on her in such matters. As soon as the news reached Calcutta, Swami Saradananda made elaborate arrangements for the occasion; and the ceremony was well worthy of the great soul that had presented the Holy Mother to the world. Twenty-five brass pitchers, umbrellas, seats, sandals, and other things, were given away as gifts to brahmins. And the villagers, both brahmins and non-brahmins were sumptuously fed. The last wish of the grandmother was also fulfilled by cooking sufficient pumpkin curry for all.

The intense sorrow and the strain of the obsequies told on the Mother's health heavily. As a result she became emaciated and she took one full month to recover. We do not know when she left for Calcutta after this. Most probably she did so some time in March or April, 1906, when she took residence again at 2/1 Baghbazar Street. The venerable lady Gopaler Ma was then in her death-bed at the Nivedita School premises. When the Mother went to visit her a few days before she passed away, that very affectionate lady who looked upon all as her divine child Gopala, said, 'Is it you Gopala come here?' and she stretched forth her hand to take hold of something. The Mother did not understand whom she meant and what she wanted. Then the woman devotee in attendance explained that she wanted the sacred dust of the Mother's feet, who to her was none other than the Master as identified with her Gopala. The Mother had so long been revering Gopaler Ma as though she were her mother-in-law. But at that moment none cared to stand on formalities. The Mother made no objection, and the

attendant took the dust of her feet with her apron and rubbed it all over the body of Gopaler Ma. With a heavy heart the Mother returned home. Gopaler Ma passed into eternal silence on the 24th of Ashadha (beginning of July), 1906.

The Mother returned to her native village before the Jagad-dhatri worship of 1907, which was celebrated with due solemnity in the presence of Brahmachari Krishnalal and others.

18

GIRISHCHANDRA GHOSH

Thus far we have followed the sequence of the unfoldment of the Mother's personality from her own point of view. We must now follow by stages the gradual comprehension of that personality from the devotees' angle of vision. Most of them did not accept her as the Universal Mother from the very beginning of their discipleship. They knew her only as the wife of their guru, and so their love, respect, and responsibility towards her were based on that relationship. As a proof of this we may say, that one day a young man went to the drawing-room of Sri Kalipada Ghosh, a staunch follower of the Master, and finding no picture of the Mother there asked for the reason. As an answer Kalipada saluted the picture of the Master with folded hands and said, 'He is, indeed, our father, and he is our mother.' Not satisfied with such an explanation, the young man spoke to Girishchandra Ghosh, the well-known actor-dramatist and devotee. The latter said, 'Did we ourselves recognize her in earlier days? It was Niranjan who opened our eyes.' The outspoken Swami Niranjanananda not only accepted the Mother as divine, but also openly preached her divinity among the devotees without any reserve. The other world-renouncing young men recognized this divinity thereafter and offered her their hearts' adoration, but even so they were not so aggressive in propagating their belief. Niranjanananda was of a different temperament; the light he had, he would not hide under a bushel. As a result of this, Girish Babu and others got a faint glimpse of her greatness.

The Master once declared that Girish's faith was more than overflowing.[1] Along with others, Girish had

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1. Literally, 'five annas over and above five quarters of a rupee.' Four quarters make a rupee; five quarters make it more than enough; and five annas added to them make it more than over-sufficient.

known the Mother as his guru's wife; but from the day he knew her as divine, his reverence for her blazed into white heat. The following incident gives a little insight into his mental make-up at this time. His second wife was still alive. One evening Girish was sauntering on his roof with his wife, while on the roof of Balaram Babu's house, the Holy Mother was taking the air. Girish's wife recognized the Mother and said to her husband, 'Look there, the Mother is strolling on the roof of yonder house.' Girish turned his back to that roof saying, 'No, no, mine are sinful eyes; I shan't thus look at her stealthily;' and climbed down. The Mother came to know of this later from Girish Babu's wife.

Many believe that it was to the exceptional good fortune of this wife that Girish owed his fame, his wealth, and the grace of the Master. He had two daughters and one son through her. But when she fell ill and expired (26th December, 1888) soon after the birth of her son, Girish found himself quite forlorn. He had relinquished in favour of the Master all his ideas of personal agency even in his own activities, and so he would not even lament for his wife. That would have implied a lack of faith in Providence. And yet the pang of separation was there. To forget this he now threw himself earnestly into the study of mathematics and the upbringing of his child.

There was another reason for this. He had once entreated the Master to be born as his son. The Master had then turned down the request. And yet when this child was born after the Master had left this world, Girish was firmly convinced that the Master had really answered his earnest prayer and blessed him by being born in his house. He, therefore, took the utmost care of the boy whose appearance and deportment so fascinated and attracted visitors that they could not resist the temptation of taking him in their arms and kissing him. And whenever the Holy Mother happened to come to this house, the boy rejoiced in sitting on her lap.

When the Mother was staying at Sourindra Thakur's house at Baranagore at the end of 1890, the great dramatist went there with the boy, taken there perhaps by Swami Niranjanananda. This incident had a certain bearing on the Mother's life. For though her divinity was recognized by a limited number of lay devotees like Master Mahashaya, her glory came to be openly avowed by all the devotees only after Girishchandra had done so. Earlier than that the Mother enforced her privacy so strictly that devotees could not see her, and had to satisfy themselves by saluting her in their own minds.

Girish's son, then in his third year, had not quite learned to speak and expressed himself through gestures. That day, at Sourindra Thakur's house, the boy became anxious to see the Mother who was upstairs. He pointed towards her room and went on saying 'ooh, ooh'. At first none understood him; but at last one of the Mother's attendants guessed his meaning and carried him upstairs. The boy saluted the Mother by falling at her feet, and coming down pressed his father with his usual gestures to go up. At this Girish burst out crying, 'O my dear, how can I possibly go to see the Holy Mother; for I am veritably a great sinner.' But as the boy was insistent, Girishchandra at last took him up in his arms and walked into the Mother's room, shaking and trembling all over. Falling at her feet with tearful eyes and a voice choked with emotion, he said, 'Mother, it is because of this child that I have had now a glimpse of your blessed feet.'

The boy did not live very long; he died at the age of three. Girish went to Jayrambati some time later in 1891 in search of some consolation, and spent a few months there on the advice of Swami Niranjanananda who accompanied him as his friend and philosopher. With them went Swamis Subodhananda, Nirbhayananda, and Bodhananda, with a cook and a servant. They went by way of Burdwan, Uchalan, and Kamarpukur. At Jayrambati, Girish took his bath in a pond and went straightway to

salute the Mother in his wet clothes. He was then full of thoughts of her and his whole frame quivered with emotion. As he looked up after touching the Mother's feet with his head, he saw her face for the first time in his life and exclaimed within himself with extreme surprise, 'Hey-day! It is you to be sure, Mother!' This astonishment was derived from an earlier crisis in his life. Once, young Girish, then in the grip of cholera and apparently without hope of recovery, had a glimpse of a radiant motherly figure putting some *prasada* into his mouth saying, 'Eat'. She wore a cloth with broad red borders; her whole being was effulgent with a heavenly light and the face looked wonderfully lit up by a benign smile. The *prasada* was very tasteful. When he woke up the taste was still on his tongue. He recovered very soon; but the vivid dream remained ever fresh in his mind. Today he recognized that dream-face in the Mother's, so exactly alike were the two. And today, after such a long lapse of time, he knew that it was this divine Mother who had been protecting him all along. Yet, to make assurance doubly sure, he inquired through another, for the Mother would not speak directly to him, whether she had revealed herself to him in this way on any previous occasion. The Mother admitted of having done so. Girish's doubts were not still laid at rest. Therefore, he asked her again on another occasion, 'What kind of a mother are you?' 'I am your true mother,' replied the Mother without a moment's hesitation, 'a mother not by virtue of being your guru's wife, nor because of any assumed relationship, nor by way of empty talk, but truly the mother.'

After spending two weeks there, all except Girish-chandra, Niranjanananda, and the servants, returned to Calcutta. The great poet enjoyed immensely that long stay in the village. Freed from the bustle of the city and its unendurable constraints and never-ending worries, he lived a care-free life. He walked in the fields with the farmers, took plenty of *prasada* sitting near the Mother, and

remained ever engaged in the thoughts and talks of the Master. In the evening he sat in the open meadow enjoying the beauty of the setting sun. The villagers were quick in discovering that he was the well-known actor-dramatist Girishchandra Ghosh of Calcutta; and hence they wanted to hear from his mouth the songs composed by himself. He argued that though he was a composer, he was not a singer. Nevertheless, the villagers remained importunate, and Girish had to satisfy their curiosity. The Mother overheard him very often and learnt some of the tunes. In later days, she sang the following lines from Girishchandra for the benefit of her inquisitive sons:

> (Gopala) turns back and looks, as he crawls away, lest the queen (Yashoda, his mother) should catch hold of him.
> The queen says, 'hold', 'hold' in fun, and Gopala crawls further away.

And one day, Haridas Vairagi of Desra came and sang to the tune of his violin:

> What a delightful news it is, O Uma (dear daughter)!
> (Dear me!) I hear from people—say if this is true, O Siva's wife—
> That you have got the name Annapurna at Banaras...

(see also p. 169.)

On hearing this song, so reminiscent of the life of the Holy Mother, neither Girish and others in the outer apartment, nor the Mother inside, could check their tears.

At Jayrambati, Girish one day entered into a vehement debate with uncle Kali as to whether the Mother was divine or not. Uncle knew her only as his sister; and this was nothing untoward for him; for the Puranas tell us that though the people of the Yadu tribe mixed freely with Krishna during play and at the time of eating, yet they could not recognize him as God. On the other hand, Girishchandra's faith was not to be shaken. 'You call my sister', argued uncle Kali, 'Mother of the Universe, Creatrix of the World, and what not! Though we were born of the same womb, I don't, forsooth,

perceive a bit of it.' 'What do you mean?' demanded Girish in a firm and deep voice, 'You are a mere village brahmin's son; you have forsaken your priestly duties of performing sacrifices, reading, and teaching, and are spending your life in farming. If one should promise you a bull, you will be dancing attendance on the man for at least six months. Is it then impossible for the Great Source of all delusion to keep you labouring under the notion that she is merely your sister, for the whole of your life? Go, and if you want freedom here and hereafter, take refuge at the Mother's feet at once. I say, go!' There was a force in what he said which impelled uncle Kali to go to the Mother and seek refuge at her feet just as Girish had suggested. But the Mother protested saying, 'O dear Kali, I am evermore the same sister. What's this you are doing now?' Uncle Kali, therefore, returned with his earlier conviction. But Girish was not so easily to be put off. He tried to send Kali to the Mother again. But uncle Kali refused to go to her.

The Mother's care and affection for Girish was unbounded. Milk was not easily available in that village, but as Girish could not do without his early morning tea, the Mother searched the village through for a little quantity of milk. Girish also noticed that his bed-sheet was always white as snow. He did not know who kept it so clean. At last he found the Mother washing it with soap at the pond. The Mother also cooked delicious dishes for him and sat by him and saw to it that he was fully satisfied.

But if she was all affection for him, she was not blind to his shortcomings. Girish had had such bitter experiences of the world that he threatened to renounce everything. But the Mother did not approve. Girish then resorted to the logical and vehement reasoning of which his keen intellect and poetic tongue were capable, and which was calculated to sweep anyone off his feet.

But the Mother successfully withstood all such argumentation, till at last Girish had to admit defeat and give up his idea.

Girish took the opportunity to spend some days at the birthplace of the Master. The Mother also went there with the party. The long association with the Holy Mother and the sacred places of Jayrambati and Kamarpukur brought the much-needed solace to Girish's lacerated heart and he returned to Calcutta to resume his literary work with fresh vigour and a clearer spiritual outlook.

Girishchandra was not only a keen observer whose poetic eyes drew in the pictures of all pure and fine things and kept them ever deposited in his heart, but also when the occasion arose, he could reproduce them vividly in words for the edification, delectation, and inspiration of others. When the Mother lived on the godown of the Sarkarbari Lane in Baghbazar (1896), Girish was a frequent visitor and came to salute the Mother. On the day that the Mother was leaving for Jayrambati (after the worship of Kali) the great poet came, and silently went up with Swami Yogananda. The others, who had gathered there, followed them. Girish prostrated himself before the Mother and said with folded hands, ' Mother, when I come to you I feel like a little child coming to its own mother. Had I been a ' grown-up ' son, I would have served my mother. But it is quite different here; you serve us and we do not serve you. You are going to Jayrambati to serve the people, even by cooking food for others in the village kitchen. How can I serve you, and what do I know about serving the Mother? ' His voice became choked and his whole face flushed with emotion as he spoke. At last checking himself a little and turning to the others who stood behind him, he said, ' It is difficult for human beings to believe that God can incarnate in a human form like our own. Can you realize that you are standing before the Mother of the Universe in the form of a village woman?

Yet she is the Mother of the Universe—Maha-maya, Maha-Sakti—appearing on the earth for the salvation of all creatures and at the same time exemplifying the ideal of true motherhood.' The words were sublime, inspiring, and calculated to electrify the atmosphere. All listened with rapt attention, and then they followed the Mother to the railway station to bid her a respectful farewell.

Girish Babu at first accepted the Mother as his guru's wife, and then as Mother and Divinity. After close observation and acquaintance he not only came to entertain for her a deep devotion that impelled him to cry from the housetop her glory, but he also developed the strength of an innocent mind that enabled him to behave towards her like a guileless child. His solicitude for the Mother's comfort was so great that she said, 'He at one time defrayed all my expenses for a year and a half. How could he make a large contribution? He was never a rich man.' Here is another instance of his loving devotion to the Mother. The Mother once returned from home, after a long time, accompanied by Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma. The train was to have reached Howrah station from Vishnupur in the morning; and so Swami Brahmananda suggested to Swami Premananda that they might go to the station to convey their respects to her. Swami Premananda readily agreed. But at Howrah, the train was late by three hours. The two Swamis were in a fix for a little while, for the problem of transport between Belur and Howrah in those days was a difficult one. Besides, it was a summer day, and all, including the two Swamis, who had come to meet the Mother, felt uncomfortable. Still, undaunted they decided to stay on. The train steamed in long after the scheduled time and Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma carefully helped the Mother to get down from the train. But as soon as Golap-Ma's eyes fell on the two Swamis, she went to Swami Brahmananda and reproved him saying, 'Well, Maharaj, have you lost your senses? The Mother has travelled through this gruelling heat; and now if even

you create a muddle by coming here to salute her, then what should I say of the others?' The innocent Swami felt guilty and dared not go a step forward. Seeing him in such a plight, the others naturally stood where they were. The Mother was taken to Baghbazar. The two Swamis now decided that though salutation was thus ruled out, it was quite in the fitness of things for them to follow the Mother to see if adequate arrangements were made for her there. So they got into a carriage and arrived at the Baghbazar house where they sat quietly in a room below. Just then Girish came to the Mother. He was scantily dressed and the half shirt that covered his body was wet with perspiration. Finding the two Swamis there, he made inquiries about the Mother. Though he was talking in a low voice, Golap-Ma heard him and hurried down and began haranguing them again as she had done at the station. But unfortunately the scene had now changed and the chief character now on the stage was no longer Swami Brahmananda but Girishchandra Ghosh. And just as Golap-Ma fired her shots at him saying, 'I am like a duck in thunder at this wonderful devotion of Girish Ghosh. I say, Girish Babu, you like to see the Mother forsooth! But the Mother has come through this gruelling heat, and when it is but reasonable for her to take a little rest, you come even here to pester her;' Girish turned a deaf ear to all this, and at once started ascending the stairs calling to the two Swamis, 'Come, come, Maharaj (Brahmananda), Baburam (Premananda), let us go to see the Mother.' And as Golap-Ma repeated her vehement protest, Girish Babu looked back and snapped at her, 'That shrew of a woman argues, indeed, that I have come to pester the Mother; whereas the Mother would feel relieved after seeing the faces of her sons after such a long absence.' They all went up. The Mother received them cordially and blessed them. In the meantime Golap-Ma too, came up and complained with tearful eyes, 'To think that Girish Babu should talk to me

thus!' The Mother turned to her and said, 'Have I not warned you off and on not to be critical of my sons?" Girish Babu went down after saluting the Mother like a victor.

The time for the Durga worship of 1907 was drawing near. Girish and his sister Dakshina requested the Mother, then at Jayrambati, to grace the occasion with her presence at their house, and give it an added charm. They offered to bear all the expenses of her journey. The Mother was then in bad health owing to malaria, but she could not resist the call of such devout souls. So arrangements were made for the journey to Calcutta. On the appointed day she started with Radhu and Radhu's mother. On reaching Vishnupur she found Master Mahashaya and Lalit Chatterji waiting there for them with all arrangements for their food and comfort. At that time, Calcutta was in the grip of a communal trouble and the town was without any light at night. So they had advanced to Vishnupur to be sure of her safe journey. The whole party boarded the train after food and reached Howrah after nightfall. Lalit Babu's carriage was ready at the station. The Mother and her relatives entered it while others sat or stood on the coach-box and the footboards and thus conducted her safely to Balaram's house where she was to stay.

Girish's sister came the next day and saluting the Mother said that by condescending to come she had solved a problem, for Girish was sulky and argued that since the worship would be a meaningless pageant in the Mother's absence, he would not have it that year unless she came.

The worship commenced after a few days, the initial ceremonies being held in the Mother's presence. At the house of Balaram Babu, again, began a second worship. From early morning of the first day of worship began pouring in a stream of devotees with flowers in their hands to be offered at the feet of the Mother, which she accepted sitting quietly for hours together. Then she was

requested to go to Girishchandra's house, where she stayed till the end of the day's worship.

On the second day of the celebration also the Mother accepted the worship of the devotees in the houses of Balaram and Girish. She was not well then; still she sat the whole time, covering herself with a cotton sheet. She disappointed none. But the strain of the two consecutive days made her so ill that it was decided that she would not be present at night at the most important worship at the moment of the juncture of the eighth and ninth days of the moon, when the demon Mahisha was killed by the Goddess. That was a sore disappointment to them all and terribly depressing for Girish. But as the blessed moment approached the Mother decided to witness the worship and with the women devotees, she walked to the backdoor of Girish's house, where she knocked and announced, 'Here I am.' The news spread with electric speed and created fresh enthusiasm. The maidservant opened the door. Girish heard with the greatest delight that the living Divine Mother was at his door to accept his worship, notwithstanding all personal inconveniences. A little while ago he had been telling his friends in the drawing-room upstairs that his going down to the place of worship was vain inasmuch as the Mother would not be there. Now at the happy news he said with a choked voice and gasping breath, 'I thought that my worship had come to nought, and just now the Mother knocks at the door and announces, "Here I am".' They all hurried down. As the Mother stood at the north-west corner fixing her eyes on the image of the Goddess, the devotees approached her and offered handfuls of flowers at her feet. The third day's worship, too, passed off merrily. All the three days the Mother accepted the flower offerings of all her children, known or unknown, not excepting even the actors and actresses of Girish's theatrical troupe.

After the celebration, the Mother was eager to return home; but the devotees would not allow her before the

worship of Kali. Accordingly, she prolonged her stay and left Calcutta on the 24th of Kartika (10th November). She went home via Vishnupur. The people at Jayrambati were informed well in advance to keep ready a palanquin at Desra. But the uncles did nothing, and as a consequence the Mother and her companions had great difficulty in walking home in a dark night. We have already narrated this event in the chapter 'A Self-imposed Limitation'. The Mother's health was bad at that time, and yet she had to be busy about her brothers' household duties. Hence the Calcutta devotees sent Golap-Ma and Kusumkumari with her. Golap-Ma left for Calcutta when the Mother had recovered a little.

HOLY MOTHER AT FIFTY-TWO

HOLY MOTHER AT FIFTY-EIGHT

SWAMI YOGANANDA

SWAMI SARADANANDA

19

SWAMI SARADANANDA

Many years had elapsed since the Master departed from this life, during which period the number of disciples of the Mother had increased considerably. Many of them visited her at Jayrambati. Among them, Dr. Jnanendranath Kanjilal went there in the first quarter of 1908 with some essential medicines for the free treatment of the villagers, many of whom were benefited by his presence. His name having spread to remote villages, every day the crowd at his door was quite considerable. Noticing this, the Mother said with pride. 'My gifted son has come; why shouldn't people gather?' The villagers expressed their gratitude to the doctor in various ways, and at the time of his departure the Mother saw him off personally, accompanying him to the border of the village.

The Mother was in indifferent health in those days. She had a renewed attack of her old trouble, rheumatism; and in addition to this, she was attacked by malaria soon after Dr. Kanjilal left. The temperature rose so high that it caused grave anxiety to all. During one night, she was thus talking in a delirium: 'I have to go. No. Why?—For Radhi. Well, let it be so.' It seemed as though she was talking with the Master; the Mother wanted release; but the Master asked her to stay on for Radhu's sake. However that might have been, Dr. Kanjilal had left behind certain specific medicines for certain common diseases, one of which was administered to her whereupon she recovered.

Even while the Mother lived in her village home, Swami Saradananda kept himself informed of her welfare through letters or messengers, and sent her money as occasion demanded. Furthermore, he was always eager to keep her in Calcutta; but he would not do anything against her slightest wish. This time, too, when she fell ill, he proposed more than once to bring her to Calcutta; but the Mother refused. In the meantime, there

had been a great change in Calcutta. When the Mother came to Calcutta, she had often to live in the houses of devotees. She was, of course, noted for her endurance and adaptability; but it pained Swami Saradananda to find her personal freedom smothered in others' houses. Moreover, of late, many of her relatives and women devotees had been moving about with her; and for most householders it was difficult to accommodate so many people at a time or for any long period. The expenses, too, were not inconsiderable. To arrange for rented houses was not easy for penniless monks like Swami Saradananda; and suitable houses were not always available at the proper time or place. Often enough, the houses were away from the Ganges thereby causing inconvenience to the Mother who had to have her daily bath in its holy waters. Besides, a permanent house was necessary to locate the offices for the Bengali periodical *Udbodhan* and to accommodate its staff. Taking into consideration all these factors, Swami Saradanana decided to launch on a bold scheme—he would have a permanent brick-built house at Baghbazar.

Kedarchandra Das had gifted away to the Belur Math on the 18th of July, 1906, a small plot of land (measuring about 260 sq. yards.) on the Gopal Neogi Lane, in Baghbazar, not very far from the Ganges. At first it was proposed to have a tiled shed on this land for the *Udbodhan*. But Swami Saradananda stood for a small brick structure. To start with he had in hand a meagre fund of Rs. 2,700/- got together through the sale of Swami Vivekananda's books, which amount, it was found on calculation, would not carry him beyond the foundation. Still he was sanguine of finishing the structure through loans. Such boldness did not go unchallenged, to be sure. But depending on the Mother's grace, he borrowed Rs. 5,700/- and started building at the end of 1907. But as the work proceeded, he had to borrow more money; and at last through his determination and bold execution, the *Udbodhan* got, at a cost of eleven thousand rupees, a

permanent house to which it was shifted at the end of 1908. This house had then six rooms on the ground floor, three on the first, and one on the second, or ten rooms in all. The lowest rooms were meant for the *Udbodhan* and the others for the Mother and her companions. The Mother was at Jayrambati at that time and did not like to come even though the news of the completion of the house reached her.

One incident which took place in the middle of March 1909, is worth mentioning here. Swami Yogavinode of Kankurgachhi, celebrated the Master's birthday at Kamarpukur at that time, and to make it a complete success took the Holy Mother there. She enjoyed it immensely.

Just after the celebration there arose a new situation at Jayrambati. For meeting it adequately, the Holy Mother requisitioned the services of the most dependable and level-headed of her sons, Swami Saradananda. The Mother had been acting as the guardian of her brothers who lived in a joint family. But as the brothers and their wives grew up and their families expanded, differences and tensions developed, as a result of which the brothers wanted to be separated; and the Mother also found that to be the only logical solution. For bringing about this settlement Swami Saradananda was invited to help with his personal presence.

On the 23rd of March, 1909, Swami Saradananda started for Jayrambati in the company of Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and a Brahmachari and arrived there the next day. Then he spent a few days in visiting such places, as Navisan, Kamarpukur, etc. A remarkable trait in the Swami's character to be noticed at this time was that, though he had come evidently for a settlement of worldly affairs, he spent most of his time in talking about the Master or editing the *Jnana-yoga* of Swami Vivekananda.

The Mother used to be very busy at the time. In addition to her daily normal duty, she cooked some dishes

morning and evening for Swami Saradananda. And she attended to such minute details as levelling the unpaved courtyard where water might have created a depression. Seeing her so busy, the Brahmachari wanted to help her. But the Swami, who knew better, warned him that if he did any such thing, it would reflect discredit on the aunts who would be accused of being unmindful of their old sister-in-law.

When some days had thus passed away, Sri Kedarnath Datta[1] of Koalpara was brought there to make measurement of the landed property. Kedar went on with his work, while Swami Saradananda's mind still followed its wonted habit of spiritual aloofness. After the lands had been measured, there arose the question of division, in which Swami Saradananda had to play a vital part. The documents were all in the keeping of uncle Kali; but uncle Prasanna wanted them to be in his own custody. Ultimately he proposed a division of the papers; Swami Saradananda, however, decided that lands and documents would be simultaneously dealt with. Uncle Prasanna was not reconciled to this; therefore, taking advantage of the Swami's momentary absence from the room where the talk was proceeding, he tried to snatch away the papers from his brother, and as a consequence a scuffle ensued. But as Swami Saradananda again stepped in, uncle Prasanna sat down gloomily. In fact, there was a repetition of what usually happens under such circumstances in many a joint family on the eve of disruption. And yet Swami Saradananda remained unruffled like the immobile Himalayas; and relying fully on his judgment and direction, the Mother kept her mind absolutely above these worldly turmoils. Drawing attention to this equipoise of the Mother based as it was on a spiritual insight, the Swami said to the Brahmachari, 'You have seen us often enough

1. Later on he became a monk under the name Swami Keshavananda and head of the monastery at Koalpara, which he had started as a lay worshipper.

—how we flare up at seeing our slightest wish disregarded. But look at the Mother. What a hell her brothers are creating and yet how calm and collected she is at all times!'

When the terms of the partition had been worked out, they had to be incorporated in a document. The arbitrators were Swami Saradananda, Sri Saradaprasad Chatterji of Tajpur, and Sri Shambhuchandra Roy of Jibta. Sri Chatterji asked the Mother through her brothers which house she would prefer to live in. She sent her answer: 'Rats bore holes and snakes live therein.' Sarada Babu, a man of the world, was not impressed by such sentimentalism; and he had it explained to her that the whole property—lands, houses, and all was being partitioned, and so if any house was not set apart for her, where would she live in Jayrambati? This time, too, the Mother's answer was, 'Some days I shall live in Prasanna's house and some days in Kali's.' Without further ado, Sri Chatterji allotted to uncle Prasanna's share the house where the Mother lived. The documents were executed and duly registered at Kotulpur. Then the uncles took possession of their respective shares. At last the Mother heaved a sigh of relief and told Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma that she would go to Calcutta. Accordingly, Swami Saradananda fixed Friday, the 21st of May, as the day of departure.

It was decided that the bullock-carts carrying the party would reach Koalpara at four o'clock in the afternoon, and after a brief halt would proceed to Vishnupur. Of the four carts, one was occupied by the Holy Mother, Radhu and Maku; the second by Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma; the third by Swami Saradananda; and the last by the Brahmachari and one Ashu from Jayrambati. When the carts reached Koalpara at about eight or nine o'clock in the night, the devotees of the village unyoked the bullocks from the Mother's cart and drew it themselves till they arrived at the house of Sri Kedarnath Datta. The Mother was taken for rest to the shrine of Kedar while others went to the local school-house. On inquiry

about the delay, it was learnt that the wheels of the carts got stuck up in the mud near the river at Shihar. The devotees had not anticipated such a long delay, and had arranged for light refreshments only. As it did not at all strike them that something should be done for the night meals, they went on talking leisurely with the Mother. The Jayrambati party, on the contrary, took it for granted that even without any suggestion from their side, the Koalpara people would arrange for their night meals. As a result of this misunderstanding time rolled on uselessly, when at last it dawned on the Jayrambati people that they had waited uselessly and it was better to move forward. Therefore, at the instance of the elders the Brahmachari cried out from the entrance of Kedar's house: 'It is getting extremely late.' The whole party at once hurried to the carts, which started immediately for Vishnupur. They halted at Kotulpur at about ten o'clock to procure from a sweetmeat seller some food with which they appeased their hunger in the temple premises of Shantinatha Siva. They reached Vishnupur next morning and entrained for Calcutta at night.

The 23rd of May, 1909, is a red letter day in the annals of the premises No. 1, Udbodhan Lane, Baghbazar, Calcutta; for on that day the Holy Mother set her sacred foot there. Swami Saradananda felt all his labour repaid when he saw the Mother established in her own house. The situation of the house might not have been attractive, but it was after the Mother's mind in many ways. The land in front was then an open field without any hutment, and served as a grazing ground for stray cattle. The Ganges was near at hand, a full view of which could be had from the terrace. And as one's eyes extended far to the north, one could have a sight of the tops of the tall village trees in the outskirts of the city. The Mother was overjoyed to see the house and blessed Swami Saradananda heartily.

On the altar in the shrine was placed the Master's picture over which was hung a silk canopy made by Sister

Nivedita. In the adjoining room there was a new couch for the Mother and near it an old bedstead for Radhu. The Mother disapproved of the arrangement saying, 'I can't live separated from the Master, nor is it proper.' So the two beds were placed in the shrine-room. The first night passed off this way. But next day, the Mother said that she felt uncomfortable on the couch without Radhu alongside of her, and Radhu, too, did not feel happy when alone. Accordingly, the couch was taken out and only the bedstead remained for both of them to sleep on. Thus in all affairs, big or small, Swami Saradananda considered himself a servant of the Mother and was ever ready to fulfil her slightest wish.

Here we must adduce certain facts to illustrate the devotion that the Swami had for the Mother, and the tenderness she had for him; for otherwise one cannot comprehend the important role that Swami Saradananda played in this divine drama.

In the beginning of 1920, during Swami Saradananda's stay in Banaras, when the Mother's going to Calcutta became imperative, she coolly said, 'There can be no question of my going to Calcutta unless Sarat is there. To whom am I to go? While I am there, if Sarat happens to say, "Mother, I am going out for a few days," I shall say, "Tarry a little, my son; let me first step out from this place and then you can start." Who but Sarat will bear my burden?' On another occasion she said, 'I can stay at that place so long as Sarat is there. After him I don't see any one who can shoulder my responsibility. Sarat can do so in every way. Sarat is my burden-bearer.' The hearer asked the Mother, 'Can't Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) do so?' 'No,' replied the Mother, 'Rakhal is not of that temperament. He can't face troubles. He can do so intellectually or through some one. He is of a totally different make-up.' The questioner pursued, 'What about Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda)' 'No,' replied the Mother, 'not even he.' 'But, as a matter of fact, he

is running the (Belur) Math.' 'Let it be so,' replied the Mother. 'Think of the responsibilities for a woman! He can make inquiries from a distance.' On another day she said, 'It is extremely difficult, my child, to stand up against my heavy pressure. Nobody excepting Sarat will be able to shoulder my burden.'

A devotee from Ranchi came and told the Mother, 'I have come to take you to Ranchi for some days. The fixing up of a house and other things have been arranged for.' 'Does Sarat know?' inquired she. 'No' replied the devotee. 'Then there can be no going for me,' clinched she. 'Sarat came and returned disappointed. Let me go to Calcutta first. If he advises, then this will be considered.' 'But, Mother,' pleaded the devotee, 'we have already made the arrangements.' The mother answered, 'Why did you arrange without informing me first?' When the devotee had left, she said, 'Look here, my child, people think it is very easy to take me. They know only sensation-mongering. On another occasion they printed leaflets that I would go to Dacca, though I knew nothing of it. They can serve me for a couple of days or so. Is it easy to assume my responsibility? I have yet to see any one except Sarat who can bear that burden. He is my Vasuki (the mythological serpent). What a lot of work he is doing by spreading his thousand hoods; wherever there is any rainfall, he spreads his umbrella (hood) to protect me.'

Sri Surendranath Mazumdar once approached the Mother with his brother Sri Sourendranath Mazumdar for initiation. As the Mother was ill, she asked them to come a few days later. But finding Surendra inflexible, she said, 'Go to Sarat; it will be as he advises.' The devotee still expostulated, 'We don't know anybody else; it is to you that we have come, and you must grant us this.' 'What do you mean?' said the Mother in reply. 'Sarat is my crest-jewel. It shall be as he will decide.' The Mother spoke with such emphasis that the devotees found no way out but to obey; and hence they approached Swami

Saradananda for his approval. But he too argued that it was impossible to arrange for initiation so long as the Mother was in ill health. Then the devotees related the whole incident, on hearing which the Swami kept silent for a while and then said, 'You say that the Mother spoke thus? Well, you come prepared on such a day.'

Though Swami Saradananda received so much honour from one whom he considered the sheet-anchor of his life, yet he was never proud. He was then writing his masterpiece, the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, with the proceeds of which he hoped to liquidate the debt he had incurred. One day as he opened his papers to begin the daily work, a devotee came and prostrated himself before him. The Swami looked up and inquired with an amused smile, 'Why this ceremonious salute of yours?' The devotee replied,' How you talk, sir? Whom else shall I salute if not you?' Humility incarnate as the Swami was, he replied, 'I also implore and wait for her favour by whom you have been blessed. She can even at this moment seat you here in my place if she so desires.'

The Swami considered himself a mere door-keeper at the Mother's house. But this self-imposed duty was not always a pleasant one. One summer noon Sri Surendranath Roy, a devotee from Barisal, walked from his residence on Harrison Road to the Mother's house, a distance of about three miles, and arrived there just when the Mother had come in and was taking rest. Though Surendra was tired and wet with perspiration, he was so eager to see the Mother that he tried to walk straight up the stairs without waiting for formalities. But there stood Swami Saradananda blocking the way and saying, 'I can't allow you to go to the Mother now; she has just returned and is tired.' 'Is the Mother a monopoly of yours?' blurted out the devotee in a fit of ill humour and walked up pushing the Swami aside. But once in the Mother's presence, he became penitent and thought, 'Bless God, that I may not meet him when going down.' He related the whole inci-

dent to the Mother, who consoled him saying that neither could her children be really guilty, nor could her sons be offended. Still he descended with trepidation and a guilty conscience to find to his dismay the Swamy still there at his post. Surendra saluted him and begged to be forgiven for the offence. But Swami Saradananda embraced him warmly and said, 'What offence can there be? Can one see the Mother unless one is so earnest?'

Within a few weeks after her arrival at the new house, the Mother had an attack of chicken-pox (middle of June 1909), for the treatment of which she was put under a priest of the Sitala temple in Baghbazar Street. The brahmin came every day and the Mother bowed down before him after throwing the hem of her cloth round her neck like a devout lady, and took the dust of his feet. One day an attendant remonstrated that it ill befitted her to be so obsequious; moreover, the brahmin might as well be loose in character. The Mother merely replied, 'The fact is that he is a brahmin in spite of everything. One should have due respect for his robes; the Master did not, in fact, come to destroy.' When she recovered, she told Swami Shantananda, 'My body is so weak that I can't undertake a fast; you do so on my behalf for Shitala's favour and offer worship to Her.' The Swami fasted as he was directed and worshipped Shitala near Chitpore.

After recovery, the Mother used to be taken in Lalit Babu's carriage to different places along with Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma. Thus she visited the Parshwanatha temple, Ramrajatala, Navagopal Babu's house in Howrah and many such places. She went twice to the Yogodyana at Kankurgachhi (21st of August and 6th of September). She was present on the 12th of September at the Minerva Theatre where the *Pandava-Gaurava* was staged. When the Divine Mother appeared and the song 'Look at the goddess who enchants the heart of Shiva' etc., began, she fell into *samadhi*. Girishchandra enacted the role of Kanchuki in the performance.

Golap-Ma now shifted permanently to the Mother's new house, and she slept with the mad aunt in the room adjoining the Mother's room to the west. In that room the Mother made betel rolls and rubbed oil on her body before bath. The southern room was then used for dining purposes. Yogin-Ma used to come twice every day and lend a helping hand to Golap-Ma in all kinds of domestic duties such as measuring out stores and dressing vegetables for the kitchen.

During the Mother's stay in the new house there was a *Kirtana* by Sri Jatindranath Mitra at the house of the Dattas at 1, Lakshmi Datta Lane. The Mother and some women devotees went there on invitation. Jatindra was not a professional singer, but he had a sweet voice. The subject for the *kirtana* that day was the separation of the *gopis*, the sweethearts of Krishna, from him. It was all a wail of agony, and all were impressed both by the melody and by the sentiments. The Holy Mother, behind the screen, was in a state of semi-consciousness. The time now came for the performer to depart, for he had to catch a train for another place. Finding that the sitting was about to be closed with a final song of separation, the Mother, still in her spiritual afflatus, had it communicated to the singer that the *kirtana* should end with a song of union. Jatindra obliged her and took leave. But the last song, with its charming sentiments, tune, cadences, and richness of voice carried the Mother's mind to another level of existence, so much so, that she sat quietly where she was, totally lost to the environment. Golap-Ma, who was acquainted with such inebriation lifted up the Mother laying hold of her hands and led her to the carriage after some nominal refreshment. She noticed that the Mother had still no control over her feet which faltered at every step; and so she had to be bodily lifted to the carriage. On reaching the 'Udbodhan' house, she was led up the stairs by two of her attendants to the shrine-room, where, too, she stood still without a wink in her eyes and any

response to outer call. Noticing this, Golap-Ma remarked, 'I witnessed this mood of the Mother at Vrindaban, and here I see it again.' Finding that the Mother's mind refused to return to the normal plane, the devotees decided that since she had incarnated as a Mother for the sake of her children, the call 'Mother' might bring her round. So one attendant kept on repeating that word in her ears till there was some quivering of the body and then she said in a clear tone, 'Why, my son?' The devotees now drew sighs of relief, and the Mother then engaged herself in offering food to the Master in the normal way.

Swami Saradananda's works were multifarious — the service of the Mother, Secretaryship of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, writing of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* for the repayment of the loan, and courteous reception of the devotees coming to pay their respects to the Mother. Over and above all these, he sang for the Mother whenever ordered by her. When the evening service was over and she had finished her *japa*, she sent word that she would like to hear a few devotional songs. The musical instruments were near at hand in the drawing-room which also served as the Swami's office. He got hold of somebody to play on them and sang with a sweet voice such songs about the Divine Mother or about Shiva as the Mother liked.

The Mother spent about six months in the new house and then left for Jayrambati on the 16th of November, 1909. In the same year, on the 14th of December, the Swami purchased an adiacent plot measuring about 100 sq. yds. for Rs. 1,800/- for the extension of the house. Later on, at the beginning of 1915, the present house of the Holy Mother was completed by adding a few more rooms to the earlier ones.

On her way home, the Mother got down at Koalpara. The devotees of the place spread lotuses over the path that she was to tread. She walked over them to the place of resting. There she had her bath and some light refreshment

and then started for home. She visited Koalpara again on her return journey to Calcutta after some seven or eight months. Kedar's mother accompanied her to Calcutta, and the rumour went round that the Mother intended to go to the South on a pilgrimage.

She stayed in her Calcutta house till the beginning of December. It was very cold then, and the devotees wanted her to put on a warm Guernsey frock. Accordingly, a good frock was obtained from a foreign shop for Rs. 10/- given by Swami Saradananda. The Mother was apparently delighted to have it and used it for three days. But on the fourth day, she spoke out her mind frankly, 'My son, is it becoming of a woman to wear a frock? And yet I have worn it for three days to please you.' With these words she took it off and never again wore it. But though she did not use any frock or bodice, she wrapped her cloth round her body and tied it into a fine knot under the arms in such a way that the whole body remained covered. In fact, it was remarkable how she avoided luxury despite her command over resources and how she maintained her old-fashioned, rural simplicity in the midst of metropolitan finery.

20

IN THE SOUTH

For one reason or another the date of the Mother's departure for the South Indian pilgrimage was repeatedly being postponed. However, Balaram's wife Krishnabhavini Devi had been cherishing the desire for a long time; and she also entertained the hope of taking the Holy Mother to their estate at Kothar in Orissa and keeping her there for some time. It was finally settled that the Mother would start for Kothar on the 18th of Agrahayana (November-December), 1910, with Golap-Ma, Ramakrishna Babu's mother (Krishnabhavini) and his aunt, the mad aunt Surabala and her daughter Radhu, Brahmachari Shukul (Swami Atmananda), Brahmachari Krishnalal, Sri Ramakrishna Bose, and other devotees. The Mother and her women companions travelled by second-class while the men travelled by inter class. At Bhadrak station Tulasiram, brother of Swami Premananda, was present with men and palanquins and conducted them to Ramakrishna Babu's estate office. After some rest, they went to Kothar, about eighteen miles away. Swami Achalananda joined them there in a few days. The whole party felt immensely happy at this place; but the condition of the mad aunt Surabala worsened owing to the mental strain consequent on living in a stranger's house. Hence she had to be sent back to Jayrambati.

One member of the Mother's party had adopted a very strict regimen for himself for a couple of months, his argument being that he was following the Mother in her austerity. But the Mother one day served plenty of good food on his plate despite his protest and advised him to eat it all. The devotee obeyed for the time being; but in the afternoon he asked the Mother in the course of a discussion, 'Why do you deny yourself the things you serve me so plentifully?' The Mother replied, 'Do I eat through one mouth? Don't be silly. I tell you, you shall eat.' From that day his hesitation was over.

Because of the Mother's presence, the worship of Saraswati was performed that year with great eclat. On that occasion, Ramakrishna Babu and his wife took *mantra* from the Mother. Three devotees from Shillong—Surendrakanta Sarkar, Hemantakumar Mitra, and Birendrakumar Mazumdar—were initiated on the same day. Sri Devendranath Chatterji, postmaster of Kothar, who had embraced Christianity in youth under a blind impulse, now felt repentant, and wishing to return to the Hindu fold, consulted many about the possibility of a reconversion. The news reached the ears of the Mother who opined that if he performed a purificatory rite before the image of Radha-Shyama-Chand, the tutelary deity of the Kothar family, on the eve of the Saraswati worship, and then recited the *Gayatri mantra* and wore the sacred thread he would be re-established in his brahminhood. Following her injunctions, Devendra Babu shaved his head, performed the purificatory rite, and received the *Gayatri mantra* and the sacred thread from Brahmachari Krishnalal. Then he approached the Mother in all humility for initiation, which she gladly granted him on the day of the worship of Saraswati, and blessed him by presenting him a piece of cloth.

On the night of the worship there was an opera in which there was no dialogue but only music, dance, and a little acting. Two boys, who played the leading roles of Radha and Krishna, had such sweet voices and charming poses, that the Mother was highly attracted and wanted the performance to be repeated the next day. Ramakrishna Babu gladly complied. The immersion of the Devi's image was also put off to the third day, worship being performed again on the second.

One incident at Kothar is highly illuminating. The Mother used to take some rest after the midday meal, and then she sat in the rear of the house with an attendant, to have her letters written. A few days after the above incidents, the attendant found on going there for his duty

that the Mother sat absent-mindedly with her legs outstretched and eyes looking vacantly at something at a distance. After spending about a quarter of an hour in this mood she woke up to her surroundings and finding the attendant there, asked, 'How long have you been here?' 'Not long', replied he. The Mother then went on in her own mood, 'To come down again and again! Is there no respite? Siva and Sakti move together; where there is Siva, there is Sakti — there's no escape! Yet people don't understand.' The talk continued in this strain for a pretty long time. Among other things the Mother said that the Master has to incarnate from age to age for the good of his creatures; for they are his to be sure. In this connection she alluded to one of her personal experiences. She once saw that the Master had become everything — the blind, the maimed, all were he; the miseries of the creatures were his; and so the Mother too, had to share in the alleviation of their sufferings. When her heart was caught up in this flow of infinite compassion, she had to forgo her rest and sleep, and it seemed to her then that the only rational course to follow was to give up personal comfort and think out means for the welfare of all creatures. As a consequence when all were resting, she knew no repose. As the talk flowed on thus on a transcendental level, the vesper bells of the temple apprised her of the time of the day, and she rose hurriedly for the evening services.

It was arranged that from Kothar the Mother would go on a pilgrimage to Rameshwara in the extreme south. When the proposal was first mooted, the Mother said, 'I shall go; my father-in-law went there.' When the final decision had been taken, Swami Ramakrishnananda in Madras and Swami Saradananda in Calcutta were informed. Swami Saradananda heartily approved of it, and Swami Ramakrishnananda extended a cordial invitation, intimating at the same time his willingness to shoulder all responsibility. So it was settled that the pilgrims would start in the middle of February. The party consisted of

Holy Mother, Brahmacharis Shukul and Krishnalal, Golap-Ma, Ramakrishna Babu's mother and aunt, Kedar's mother, Radhu, and the attendant mentioned earlier, as also the mad aunt Surabala who was brought back by the Mother on the eve of the departure. They started by the south-bound Madras Mail, Ramakrishna Babu accompanying them up to the Khurda Road junction, from where he went to Puri.

Leaving Khurda Road behind, the train proceeded south-west and steamed along the shores of the vast Chilka lake over whose surface ripples danced under the soft morning breeze. Here and there, cranes waking with the dawn were searching for food in shallow water or darting across the blue sky in formation. Round the small islands that dotted the lake, flew various kind of birds such as the *nilakanthas* (blue-necked jays). At the sight of the latter, the Mother became overjoyed like a girl and saluted with folded hands, for such a sight of the bird augured well. With the appearance of the sun, white masses of vapour of various shapes began to rise up and lend an eerie atmosphere to the scene. The train speeded on, and the passengers looked out through the windows towards the fast changing landscape, the vast expanse of the lake giving place to wooded undulating land. Gradually, at eight in the morning the train reached Berhampore, the head-quarters of the Ganjam district. The Bengali Manager of Messrs Kelner and Company was present at the platform in accordance with Swami Ramakrishnananda's request; and he took the whole party to his house with great courtesy. In the afternoon, a great number of people gathered to pay their respects to the Mother. They prostrated themselves before her after offering her plantains, cocoanuts, and such other fruits. The pilgrims resumed their journey next day and passed by Vishakhapatnam in the afternoon. This health-resort and port town, hanging on the sides of a hillock, attracted the Mother by its beauty; and she said with joy, 'See, see, it

looks just like a picture.' They reached Madras next day at about noon.

At Madras station, Swami Ramakrishnananda and a number of devotees were present to give a fitting reception to the Holy Mother. As the train steamed in, they raised a loud cry of *jaya* (victory) and elation. A two-storeyed house had been rented near the Ramakrishna Math at Mylapore, where the Mother and her companions were taken. Here she lived for about a month during which period she visited the Kapalishwara and the Parthasarathi temples, the beach, the aquarium which was then still incomplete, and the fort. At the last place she drove in a rickshaw for the first time in her life. She used to go out every evening visiting various places of interest.

At her own temporary residence there was a continuous stream of eager souls who wanted to be sanctified—by touching her feet. One day the girls of a local school came to sing religious songs in Tamil and play on their violins and this pleased the Mother very much. Many were initiated by her at this place. Whether it was due to the basic unity of the Indian culture or the Mother's incomprehensible power of transmitting ideas, she could make the new-comers understand the *mantras* and the processes of *japa* and meditation without the help of interpreters, whose assistance she took for other purposes.

In a few days, the Mother's nephew Ramlal arrived at Madras for visiting Rameshwara, and it was decided that the whole party would start for Madurai, famous for its temple of the goddess Minakshi. But just then Ramakrishna Babu's aunt fell ill, and the departure had to be postponed. But it was soon found out that the lady would take a long time to recover. Hence after making adequate provision for her treatment and nursing, the others started on their journey. Through Swami Ramakrishnananda's scrupulous care for providing all possible comfort, the

whole party had second-class accommodation in the train, and he himself accompanied them to see personally to their conveniences. The train reached Madurai in the morning, and they were taken to the house of the Chairman of the local Municipality.

Madurai stands on the river Vaigai. The chief temple there, dedicated to the goddess Minakshi and her consort Sundareshwara (Siva), holds a very high place in Indian architecture. Its tall *gopurams* or gate-towers, rising up in tiers, are very impressive because of their height, grandeur, and sculpture. The mythological anecdotes represented in stone everywhere in the temple precincts keep the devout pilgrims spell-bound for hours together. The image of the goddess appears so lifelike and inspiring that it is difficult to find a second one of its kind. For the disport of the two deities, there are a few permanent stone pavillions (*mandapas*) of which the *sahasra-stambha* (thousand pillared) and *Vasanta* spring) *mandapas* are the best. There is a small pond built in stone called the Shivaganga. The Mother and others bathed in it in the afternoon and then visited the deities. Then, in accordance with the local custom, they lighted up lamps on the banks of the pond in each one's name before returning to their residence. During their stay at Madurai, they visited among other places the palace of Tirumal Nayaka and the large tank called Teppakulam (1000′×950′). The extensive roof of the palace is supported by 125 stone pillars. In the centre of the tank there is a small island. All these sights made the Mother exclaim, 'How wonderful is the play of the Master!'

From Madurai they entrained for Rameshwara and reached Mandapam at noon from where they had to cross over in a steamer to the Pamban (or Rameshwara) island. From Pamban, which is also the name of the port across the strait, they again boarded a train and reached Rameshwara at about eleven in the night. As the temple was closed, they saluted the Deity from outside and went to live

in the quarters arranged for them by the priest-guide Gangaram Pitambara. Next morning they bathed in the sea and entered the temple, which in its massiveness and extensiveness seems to be unparalleled. It is built of stone. Round the *sanctum sanctorum* there are three successive encircling corridors. The outermost one is seventeen feet wide and measures 645 feet from east to west and 395 feet from north to south. The middle one is 500 feet and 300 feet respectively. At the entrance of the whole structure is a huge *gopuram*, every inch of which is full of fine sculpture. The story of Siva, the presiding Deity of the temple, is told in stone pillars and walls that line the corridor. On entering the innermost corridor, one finds in front the stone image of *Nandi* (Siva's bull) which is as high as an one-storeyed building; and near the *Nandi* is a tall pillar. The emblem of Rameshwara is placed in a small basin (*kunda*). As the image is made of soft sandy material, it is kept covered by a golden cap over which the *abhisheka* (bathing) water is poured. But early in the morning, one can have a look at the uncovered image. For the daily *abhisheka* and for other rites of the daily worship of Rameshwara, Ganges water alone is permitted. This is brought from North India with considerable effort, and is sold to pilgrims in small quantities to be poured over the covered emblem of Shiva.

Then the Pamban island, as also the Rameshwara temple, was under the administrative control of the Raja of Ramnad who was a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. He had instructed the temple staff by telegram that as the guru of his guru would be visiting the shrine, all facilities should be offered to her. As a consequence, the Holy Mother and her party were taken to the *sanctum sanctorum*, contrary to the general custom, and were allowed to worship the uncovered Siva image to their heart's content with Ganges water, flowers, etc. The Mother offered one hundred and eight golden leaves shaped like the real leaves of the *bel* tree. During all the three days that they stayed

there, they visited the temple every morning and evening. On the third day the Holy Mother arranged for a special worship at the temple, fed the *pandas* after hearing a recital of the glory of Rameshwara from old scriptures; and she presented to each of the *pandas* a water-pot. It is customary to sit with betel and betel-nut in hand at the time of hearing Rameshwara's exploits and offer them to the reader at the end. The Mother faithfully observed all the customs.

The temple staff had been instructed by the Raja to show the temple jewellery to the Mother and present her any piece that she might ask for. When the Raja's wishes were communicated to the Mother she was at a loss to think out what she might really be in need of; and so she said after a pause, 'What can I need? Whatever was necessary has been arranged for by Sashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda).' And then it struck her that such a refusal might offend them; and hence she corrected herself, 'Well, if Radhu has any need of anything, she will take it.' And to Radhu, she said, 'See, if you can choose anything you may have need of.' The Mother said so out of courtesy; but when the treasury was opened and the gems and diamonds glittered up, her heart began to throb and she kept on praying, 'Master, may not Radhu have any temptation.' The Master heard her. After looking at everything, Radhu said, 'What is there worth taking from all this stuff? I don't want any of these. I have lost my writing pencil; buy one for me.' At this the Mother was immensely relieved and came out to purchase from a roadside shop a pencil worth half an anna.

Brahmachari Krishnalal, who was an attendant of the Mother and who visited Rameswara with her, said to Sarala Devi one day, that on looking at the uncovered Siva image the Mother soliloquized, 'It is just as I had left it.' The devotees that were near at hand inquired, 'What did you say, Mother?' The Mother at once corrected herself and said, 'A meaningless something escaped out of my

lips.' After the party had returned to Calcutta, one day Kedar Babu of Koalpara asked the Mother at the 'Udbodhan', 'How did you find Rameshwara?' And the Mother replied, 'He is just as I had left him, my son.' Then the ever alert Golap-Ma was passing by the verandah. As soon as these words fell on her ears, she stopped and asked with enthusiasm, 'What did you say, Mother?' Taken aback, the Mother said, 'Why, what should I say? I was only saying that I was very much delighted to see it just as I had heard from you.' But Golap-Ma was not to be put off so easily, and she said importunately, 'No, Mother, I have heard everything; it won't do to retract your words now. Isn't it, dear Kedar?' And she whisked away without waiting for a reply to tell everyone of the good tidings. The devotees believe that the same personage who incarnated in the Treta yuga as Sita, the ever faithful consort of Ramachandra, and worshipped a Siva image made of sand on the sea coast of Rameshwara, descended again as the all-enduring and ever gracious Holy Mother, so that the sudden sight of the uncovered image carried her mind unconsciously across the vast span of thousands of years and the past appeared as a vivid present; and forgetful of her immediate environment she made that spontaneous remark.

Dhanuskoti is another sacred place in the island, from where the bridge thrown across the sea by Sri Rama commences. It is customary to worship the sea by presenting a golden or silver bow and arrow. As the Mother could not go there, she sent two of her attendants with the silver bow and arrow to perform the worship on her behalf.

From Rameshwara they returned to Madurai, where they rested for a day, and then they proceeded to Madras. Now, the birthday of the Master approached; and the devotees took advantage of the Mother's presence to make the occasion a great day of joyful celebration. Some people were initiated by her on that day. After the cele-

bration, she left for Bangalore on the 10th of Chaitra (end of March), 1911.

In those days, the surroundings of the Ramakrishna Ashrama at Bangalore were quiet and charming. And even at the present time the Ashrama with its extensive grounds continues to preserve that solitude in spite of the rapid growth of the city. The compound is dotted with valuable fruit and flower trees. In front runs the wide Bull Temple Road leading to the temple of that name, which enshrines a huge image of *Nandi* and is visited by streams of pilgrims. The Mother and her women companions were accommodated in the Ashrama building, while the monks and devotees lived in temporary tents outside. As the news of the Mother's visit spread over the town, devotees began to come in great numbers, and the flowers they brought for offering sometimes formed big heaps.

At Bangalore the Mother stayed for about a week. One afternoon she was taken by Swami Vishuddhananda in a carriage to the cave temple of Gavipura, a short distance behind the Ashrama. The Mother got down and visited the temple and then returned to the Ashrama by the same carriage. The whole time spent outside was not long. But, whereas at the time of their going out, there was none there at the Ashrama besides the inmates, when they returned they found the whole compound crowded with a number of visitors. At the sound of the Mother's carriage they stood up instantaneously and then prostrated themselves on the ground. The Mother, who was visibly moved by the sight, alighted from the carriage and stood there motionless for about five minutes, extending her right arm in benediction. Perfect silence reigned all around, and the whole atmosphere was charged with awe. Then the Mother silently walked to the Ashrama and sat in the central room, where the devotees gathered. Here again was enacted that speechless transmission and imbibition of transcendental bliss that the scriptures speak of. There

was no question and no answer, and yet all doubts were resolved. Breaking that tangible silence, the Mother said to Swami Vishuddhananda who was by her side, 'What a pity, I don't know their language! What solace they would derive, if I could but speak a few words!' When Swami Vishuddhananda translated this for the devotees, they said, 'No, no; this is all right. Our hearts are full indeed. No words are needed on such an occasion.' Wonderful are the ways of the Mother and wonderful are those of her children!

Here is another incident. There is a small hillock behind the Ashrama building and within its own compound. A short while before dark, the Mother climbed the hillock along with one or two others and sat on its top enjoying the beauty of the setting sun. When Swami Ramakrishnananda heard of this, he said in amazement, 'Indeed! The Mother has become a dweller on the mountain (Parvatavasini[1],' and hurried towards the place. He was stout, and began to pant as he climbed that low hillock; but undaunted he went up straight to the Mother, prostrated himself there and laying his head on her feet chanted three well-known verses from the *Chandi* beginning with *Sarvamangala-mangalye* which are used as *mantras* for the salutation of the Divine Mother:

'O auspicious One, Thou art the source of all auspiciousness—Thou art the accomplisher of all cherished desires. Thou art the giver of refuge. Thou possessest the eye of wisdom and beautiful form. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.

'O eternal One, Thou art the energy of creation, preservation and destruction. Thou art the abode of threefold Cosmic energy and Thou art also its manifester. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.

'O Mother, Thou art the saviour of the distressed and of the careworn, who take refuge in Thee. Thou art the remover of misery of all. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.'

1. Which is a name of the Divine Mother dwelling on the Himalayas or the Vindhya hills.

And he prayed 'Grace! grace!'. The Mother caressed his head, as though pacifying an importunate son, till Swami Ramakrishnananda felt himself fully blessed.

There was a funny incident at Bangalore. One day the Holy Mother, dressed in her own simple way, sat at one side of the central room and women visitors came to pay their respects to her. With them came a rich woman wearing fine clothes and costly ornaments. She took her seat in the centre of the room. A little later a group of women came, and finding the wealthy lady in the centre mistook her for the Mother. Therefore, they proceeded to salute her. The lady's protests were of no avail; the new-comers pressed on to touch her feet. At this the aristocratic lady jumped up and remonstrated vehemently. By that time, however, she was completely surrounded, and there was a scamper for the first touch of her feet, so that she had to extricate herself somehow and walk out. The Mother sat quietly at her corner all the while; and though she did not grasp one word of what the ladies spoke, she understood with a quiet smile the farce that was going on in front of her.

After spending some days at Bangalore, the Mother and her companions returned to Madras, where they spent a day or two and then started for Calcutta. On the way they rested a day at Rajahmundry where they were guests at the house[1] of Sri M. O. Parthasarathi Iyengar, District and Sessions Judge. The Mother bathed here in the Godavari. Their second halting place was Puri. This time they did not go to the Kshetra-basir Math, but went to Sashi-niketana, the other house of the Boses, where they spent some three or four days. At last they arrived at Calcutta on the 28th of Chaitra (middle of April), 1911.

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1. The house is no longer in existence, the plot of land having been acquired by the Municipal Water Works.

The first day that the Mother set her holy feet on the grounds of the Belur Math, after her South Indian pilgrimage, she was given a fitting reception. As a result of the long sojourn, she had returned with better health and a happier mind, which gladdened the devotees also. Moreover, the wonderful news of the enthusiasm created in the South by her inspiring presence and silent ministration had preceded her. And hence all had gathered there to express their devout gratefulness for her unbounded love for her children. The gates of the Math were decorated with plantain trees, under which were placed tastefully painted pitchers, filled with water and with green leaves on the top. On either side of the path stood more than a hundred devotees with folded hands. As the carriage of the Mother came in sight a few crackers were burst, and as the Mother alighted and moved slowly with her women companions, the devotees chanted the *mantras* from the *Chandi*. The order of Swami Brahmananda, abbot of the Math, rang out that nobody should break the line to salute the Mother by touching her feet. So the Mother walked unhampered. Her whole body was covered from head to foot with a white cotton wrapper; and it seemed as though a sacred and animated white image had suddenly descended on the Math ground and was moving silently from south to north. Suddenly somebody seemed to dart out of the line and as quickly salute the Mother and disappear. 'Catch him, catch him. Who's that, who's that?' called out Swami Brahmananda in great amusement. It was none other than Swami Subodhananda, who, because of his being younger than most of the other disciples of Shri Ramakrishna and his simple nature, was called by the others Khoka Maharaj or the baby monk. This exploit of the Swami amused the company very much.

The Mother was taken to the main monastery building. A *kirtana* in honour of Kali was then in progress in the courtyard below, and Swami Brahmananda sat there. Suddenly it was seen that the Swami's body had become

absolutely motionless and his smoke pipe had dropped from his hand. As he did not come round from this state of divine trance, the Mother was informed, and she instructed some one to utter a *mantra* in the Swami's ears. This acted like magic, and the Swami came down to the normal plane with words of appreciation for the music, 'Bravo! Sing on, sing on', as though he had been unmindful just for a passing moment. The Mother was now offered some *prasada* of the Master. She took a little and sent down the rest of it, which the devotees eagerly shared amongst themselves. When in the evening she took leave, a few more crackers were burst to indicate the end of the happy day's function.

21

ANGLE OF VISION

Radhu was now of marriageable age; and so to perform her wedding ceremony the Mother left for Jayrambati on the 3rd of Jyeshtha (the 18th of May), 1911, and reached Koalpara on the 5th. Koalpara had now come to occupy an important place in the life-history of the Holy Mother. Between the years 1909 and 1919, the Mother rested here for some hours during all her travels between Jayrambati and Calcutta. She used to say, 'This is my parlour.' The inmates of the monastery were whole-heartedly devoted to her and felt blessed if they could do the least service to her. This time, when the news of her coming reached them, they constructed a temporary enclosure for her with palm leaves round the bathing place of the Badujye-pukur. They also tastefully decorated the new shrine-room, enclosed its verandah with screens, cleaned the road and covered it with cloth with flowers spread over. But the Mother had no time to spare. She hurriedly bathed and finished her midday meal, and then after a little rest started for Jayrambati with Radhu in the same palanquin. Before she bade farewell, she said tenderly to the inmates of the monastery, 'Now in these parts you are my mainstay. I see that the Master has in fact made a seat for himself here. And for us all, too, a resting place has come into existence." When they all bowed down to her one by one, she touched their heads in benediction, and said, 'You all should go to Jayrambati now and then; and, in particular, you have all to go during Radhu's marriage. You will have to attend to all details of the arrangement there.'

In a few days Swami Saradananda, Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma, and one or two Brahmacharis, reached Jayrambati via Koalpara. The marriage was fixed for the 27th of Jyeshtha (middle of June), 1911. The bridegroom was Manmathanath Chatterji who belonged to the landlord

family of Tajpur. The Chatterjis were richer than the Mukherjis of Jayrambati. But Swami Saradananda, who placed the Mother's happiness above everything else, spent money unquestioningly for adorning Radhu in a way befitting a bride entering a landlord's family; and other arrangements for the celebration were on a similar scale. The bridegroom's party took full advantage of their stronger position to extract from the Swami a considerable amount of dowry. But Kedarnath Datta of Koalpara, unable to restrain himself when unreasonable demands were being made, intervened off and on in the talk between the Swami and the bridegroom's party; and the Mother disliking this kind of wrangling and ruffled temper just on the eve of a happy union, called away Kedar Babu. Radhu entered the marriage pandal adorned with gold and silver from head to foot. Uncle Prasanna performed the ceremonial handing over of his niece to Manmatha. She was then past her eleventh year and Manmatha was in his fifteenth.

There was a feast on the next day. When the guests were returning home, the Mother stood at the backdoor and inquired if they had had enough. And they heartily replied, 'May the bride and the bridegroom live happily, Mother.'

At the time of Radhu's going to her father-in-law's house, the Mother gave her a big black box. At night the Master appeared to the Mother to say, 'So you have given away one thousand rupees that was in Radhu's box!' The Mother then remembered that she had that amount of cash in the box, but it had not been removed when the box was being handed over. Next day she sent her devotee Bibbutibhushan Ghosh and a monk and got back the money.

The Mother spared no pains to see that the minutest detail of that auspicious ceremony was duly performed. And yet, in spite of all these domestic engagements, we get from the above incident an inkling of the level of detachment in which her mind soared for ever. But lest the reader should interpret this as a case of ordinary forget-

fulness, we adduce another event which more aptly illustrates our point of view. It was well known that the Mother deeply loved Radhu. And hence it was as desirable for the devotees to see the girl enter a good family as it was for the Mother. Accordingly, one well-wisher once suggested to the Mother that since Master Mahashaya had in his classes many boys of well-to-do families, he could be asked to choose a suitable bridegroom. At this the Mother remarked, 'Let a groom be hit upon, as he may, in the ordinary course of things. I will never ask any one to fall into bondage (of wedlock).' Such was her life of non-attachment, notwithstanding her being outwardly involved in all sorts of household duties, that it was comparable to a lotus leaf untouched by the water on which it floats. Yet none could accuse her of ever neglecting any task.

Radhu's marriage at Tajpur was settled by her relatives before the Mother left for the South. But on seeing the horoscopes of the pair an astrologer expressed the fear that the girl might become a widow. Yet the Mother did not override a decision taken by Radhu's well-wishers. Long after the marriage, when Manmatha sought initiation, she at first declined saying that she would not give any *mantra* to any of her relations. But she yielded at last to his importunities. After making him a disciple, she remarked that though one should not interfere with divine dispensation, Radhu might, after all, escape her widowhood by the force of that initiation.[1]

A little over two months after Radhu's marriage, the Ramakrishna Mission lost one of its chief luminaries; Swami Ramakrishnananda passed away at the 'Udbodhan' in Calcutta, on the 21st of August, 1911. When he felt that the end was near, he wanted to see the Mother. But after full deliberation, the Mother decided not to go. The tireless service that the Swami rendered to her in the South was

1. Radhu did not actually lose her husband; but we shall see that her later life was as bad as widowhood, she being forced to live separated from her husband.

still fresh in her mind How could the Mother bear the sight of the passing away of such a devoted son? And if she came to such a small house as the 'Udbodhan' with all her retinue, it would only add to the discomfort of the patient. Therefore, she sent back the messenger who had gone to Jayrambati for escorting her to Calcutta. Yet Swami Ramakrishnananda saw the Mother near his sick-bed and cried out, 'Mother has come!' Afterwards the poet Girish Babu composed a song about the Mother, taking the cue from the Swami, and the latter was highly delighted to hear it sung. Not long after, he entered the final beatitude. When the news reached Jayrambati, the Mother said sorrowfully, 'My Shashi is gone; my backbone is broken.'

When the devotees of Koalpara arrived at the Mother's house with vegetables on the occasion of the Jagad-dhatri worship that year, the Mother said joyfully, 'Greens and vegetables are not always available here, and hence one is put to great trouble at times. But, methinks, the Master will now provide everything through you'. When the devotees started to return after the worship, the Mother gave them a bundle of fried-rice and other eatables that had been offered to the deity. From that time on, the devotees sent vegetables twice or thrice every week whenever she happened to be at Jayrambati. The economic condition of the Koalpara Ashrama being bad, they could not engage anyone for carrying such loads; and hence after finishing the daily duties, they procured the necessary vegetables from the Ashrama garden or from the market and then carried the load on their own shoulders. At Jayrambati, again, if they found the Mother in need of any daily necessities, such as salt, oil, spices, wheat, etc., which could be had from villages some miles away, they volunteered with alacrity to obtain those things and carry them on their heads to her. When the devotees arrived, the Mother would direct them to leave the things in their proper places. At last they became so familiar with the arrangements there that they could do everything by themselves. When

at last they took leave of her by touching her feet, she blessed them saying, 'May you acquire knowledge; may you get faith and devotion,' and tied to their clothes some fried-rice for a light repast on the way. In fact, the Koalpara Ashrama became, as it were, a part and parcel of her own household for these few years. It had not even then been incorporated with the Ramakrishna Math at Belur.

As it had been settled that the Mother would go to Calcutta after the Jagad-dhatri worship, Brahmachari Prakash had been sent by Swami Saradananda to take her there. The 8th of Agrahayana (about November 23), 1911, was fixed as the date for the journey. A couple of days earlier, Kedar Babu (later Swami Keshavananda), the head of the Koalpara Ashrama, came to Jayrambati to make arrangements for the Mother's stay at that place. The Mother talked as she made betel rolls. When that part of the conversation was over, she said, 'Listen, my boy, as you have built a house for the Master and set up a resting place for us, I shall install the Master there when I pass through the Ashrama this time. Keep everything ready. You will have to carry on worship, offering of cooked food, vesper service, and all such functions regularly. What will you gain by the Swadesi movement[1] alone. The Master is the spring of all that we do or have; he is the ideal. Whatever you do, if you hold on to him, you will never go wrong.' The Ashrama was then a hot-bed of Swadeshi agitation; looms, spinning wheels and political talks being more in evidence than meditation, *japa*, worship, and study. As a result, the police had a sharp eye on the inmates. Nothing daunted, the head of the centre carried on with his bold programme. And hence he could not accept without question all that the Mother said. And yet he could not gather sufficient courage to contradict her openly. Therefore,

1. This political movement, set on foot on October 14, 1905, consisted in the boycotting of foreign, specially British, articles and encouraging home-made ones, even though the latter lacked beauty and fineness. It was a reaction against the autocracy of Lord Curzon, which manifested itself in its worst form in the partition of Bengal.

he argued indirectly: 'But, of a truth, Swamiji (Vivekananda) wanted us very much to work for the country, and he laid the foundation of selfless work by inspiring the youth of the country. What a lot of work would be done if he were alive now!' Carried away by the trend of his own thought, Kedar Babu unknowingly touched more than one chord in the Mother's heart. The symphony that he aroused thereby was equally sweet and full, and yet replete with deep spiritual meaning. Hardly had he finished when the Mother intervened, 'O my dear! If Naren (Vivekananda) were there today, would the Company[1] let him alone? They would lock him up in a jail. I couldn't have borne the sight. Naren was like an unsheathed sword. After his return from foreign countries, he said, "By your grace, Mother, I did not have to cross the ocean by jumping in this age[2], but went to those parts in their own ships; and there, too, I noticed, how great is the glory of the Master; what a number of good people have heard about him and accepted this idea from me with astonished eagerness!" They, too, are my children—don't you agree?' Kedar found no answer and kept silent. His first mistake was to support his own course of action by suggesting a false analogy with Swami Vivekananda, and his second error consisted in tending to convert his patriotism into a kind of dislike for foreigners. By the Mother's words he stood corrected, and it also dawned on him that selfless work cannot be properly carried on unless religion is accepted as its basis.

While on this topic, we shall be excused if we digress a little to give a fuller idea of the Mother's angle of vision. After the completion of her new house at Jayrambati in 1917, the Mother was living in it at the time of the

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1. Though the East India Company was succeeded by the British Government after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the old people continued for long to refer to the Government as the Company.

2. In search of Sita who was abducted by Ravana, King of Sri Lanka Sri Rama's messenger Hanuman crossed the strait between India and Sri Lanka jumping over it.

Durga worship. On that occasion she sent a Brahmachari to purchase some clothes to be presented to her nephews and nieces. He belonged to the Koalpara Ashrama and had imbibed a liking for country-made things. And so he purchased clothes made by the Indian mills, which were coarse and had no attractive borders. Naturally, the girls did not like them; they wanted finer clothes in exchange. The Brahmachari protested in disgust: 'Well, those are foreign clothes. To think that one can purchase them!' The Mother was there sitting in a corner. She heard everything and said with a smile, 'My boy, they (the foreigners), too, are my children. I have to carry on with all; can I afford to be one-sided? Bring for them the clothes just as they want.' And yet it was against her nature to do violence to anybody's feelings; and hence she never again sent this Brahmachari for purchasing foreign clothes; if the need arose, she asked somebody else to do so.

But liberal outlook and connivance at violence are as poles asunder. At the news of police ill-treatment towards Sindhubala and others, the Mother, though noted for her natural suavity, could hardly restrain her indignation. The wife and a sister of Deven Babu of the village Juthabihara in Bankura, had the same name Sindhubala. The sister was then in the family way. Under suspicion of complicity in subversive activity, the police wanted to arrest one of the Sindhubalas; but owing to identity of names they first took into custody the sister who was in her husband's village Sabajpur. And then they arrested the wife also. The news of these two arrests travelled from mouth to mouth till uncle Kali came in a very agitated mood and reported to the Mother that the police had treated the women inhumanly and made them walk the whole way; and that even when the villagers had protested and suggested that some transport should be arranged, the police had turned a deaf ear. At this cruel news the Mother cried in surprise, 'What do you say?' and her whole frame shook. Then

red with indignation she said, 'Is this an order of Company (Government) or an overzealous act on the part of the police? We never heard of such inhuman treatment towards innocent women in the reign of Queen Victoria. If this is an order from the Company, then it will be doomed soon. Was there no man there who could give them some slaps and snatch away the girls?' A little while after, when uncle Kali communicated to her the news of their release, she was somewhat pacified and said, 'If I had not heard this news, I would have no sleep tonight.' [1]

On another occasion the Mother was at Koalpara. The first World War (1914–18) was raging. The devotee Prabodhchandra Chatterji came and made his obeisance to the Mother, who inquired about his health and general welfare, and then asked, 'Well, my dear, what's the news of the war? What a tremendous sacrifice of lives has there been—what a machine for killing have they invented! What a lot of instruments there are nowadays—telegraph etc. See, for instance, how Rashbehari (Swami Arupanada) started from Calcutta yesterday and arrived here today. How we toiled and trudged on to reach Dakshineswar (in those days).' Encouraged by this, Prabodh Babu enthusiastically eulogized the achievements of science and said, 'The British Government has increased the general welfare in our country.' The Mother heard the whole speech and then remarked, 'But, my son, there is now in our country a greater want of food and clothing. Formerly there was no such paucity of food.'

Let us now pass on to another occasion. There was a great scarcity of cloth all round. The women could not come out of their houses for want of clothes to cover their

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1. We do not narrate the Sindhubala incident as a historian does, but just as it was communicated to the Mother. Basically it was true and took place in 1917–18. Newspapers, then, were not so much in vogue in the villages, and as news travelled by word of mouth, there were chances of distortion so far as details were concerned. We are here primarily concerned not with authentic history but with the Mother's reactions to the reports presented to her.

bodies with; and news of suicides for this reason was being frequently published in the daily papers. One day, as somebody mentioned to the Mother about some of these sad events, she was so much moved that at first tears trickled down her cheeks; and at last no longer able to check her emotion, she cried out in agony, 'When, indeed, will they (the English) go? When will they?' When she cooled down a little, she said with regret, 'In those days there were spinning wheels in every house, cotton was cultivated in the fields, all span and wove their own clothes, there was no dearth of cloth. But the Company came and destroyed it all. The Company promised ease—one could have four pieces of cloth for a rupee and one more in the bargain. All became *babus* (ease-loving); the spinning wheel went out of vogue. And now have all the *babus* become *kabu* (in a tight corner).' We have to remember that the non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi with its concomitant, the revival of the spinning wheel, was yet to come.

The Mother's heart was moved by the country's miseries; at times her eyes were blood-red at the iniquities of the foreign exploiters, or shed profuse tears at their heartless oppression. But as an ultimate remedy to all the sorrows she clung to the Master and asked others also to do so. In fact, all her thoughts and deeds centred on Sri Ramakrishna. Those were the days of the Swadesi movement; so, when one patriot asked her, 'Mother, will not the trials and tribulations of this country ever end?' the Mother replied that the Master had come for that very purpose. Accordingly, though she was attracted by the practical enthusiasm of the devotees of Koalpara, she decided that the Master should be installed in the Ashrama as its presiding deity, for otherwise the workers would soon be swept off their moorings. That was why she wanted to initiate the Master's worship there on her way to Calcutta.

That was the middle of November when it is cold in the morning. But as the Mother had to perform the

Master's worship at Koalpara, she started early by a palanquin; and Lakshmi Devi, Maku, and Radhu, and Radhu's husband Manmatha followed her in separate palanquins, while the mad aunt, Nalini Devi, Bhudev and others travelled by bullock-carts. And there was Brahmachari Prakash as the manager of the party.

The Koalpara devotees made adequate arrangements for the Master's worship. The Mother bathed after arriving there, and then placing on the altar the Master's photograph, and by its side her own, she worshipped them duly. Brahmachari Kishori (afterwards Swami Parameshwarananda) performed the *homa* at her bidding. When the installation of the Master was over, all took *prasada*. After this and before the midday meal the Mother walked with her nieces Lakshmi and Nalini to Kedar's house at a little distance. When Brahmachari Prakash came to know of this, he became annoyed and said to the local devotees, 'You know nothing of the Mother's position and prestige. Why did you make her walk without my knowledge? Anyway, you should bring her back in a palanquin.' But not waiting for his order to be executed, he went with a palanquin and two Ashrama inmates to bring her. They met the Mother on the way and Brahmachari Prakash requested her to get into the palanquin, which she did without a murmur. But on arriving at the Ashrama she reproached him saying, 'This is our rural resort. Koalpara is my parlour. These are all my own boys. I want to be a little free in my movements so long as I am here. When I come from Calcutta, I heave a sigh of relief. There you keep me shut up in a cage—I am always under restraint. If here, too, I have to toe the line, well, I shan't be able to do so—you may inform Sarat (Saradananda) accordingly.' Then the Brahmachari begged her pardon explaining that in his enthusiasm to see that there was no lack of attention on his part, he had been guilty of unwittingly curtailing her liberty.

It was planned that the journey should be resumed after six o'clock in the evening, and the food to be taken on the way should be made ready by then. But in spite of their best efforts, the Ashrama people could not finish their work in time. As this irritated the Brahmachari, they suggested that the Calcutta party might start according to schedule, and that they would somehow overtake them with the food on the way. The Mother, who heard it all, reprehended the Brahmachari thus: 'What makes you lose your balance and take them to task like that? This is village atmosphere; can everything be got ready by the clock as in Calcutta. Don't you notice how diligently the boys have been working from the morning? Whatever you may say, there will be no moving out of here before finishing our meals.' Accordingly, all had to wait and start for Vishnupur after food at eight o'clock in eight bullock-carts.

22

AT BELUR AND BANARAS

The Mother was expected to come to the Belur Math on October 16, 1912, on the evening of the *Bodhana*[1]. Evening was advancing, and yet there was no sign of the Mother's coming; and so Swami Premananda was moving about in a flurry. At the gate he saw that the plantain trees and sacred pitchers had not been arranged as yet, and he said, 'These things have not been done as yet; how can the Mother come?' No sooner was the ceremonial awakening of the Deity finished than was seen the Mother's carriage at the gate. The monks and devotees led by Swami Premananda ran up at once, unharnessed the horses, and drew the carriage into the courtyard. As the Swami was thus engaged, one could see him trembling with emotion, joy scintillating from his eyes, face, and every limb. When the carriage stopped Golap-Ma carefully helped the Mother out of it. The Mother then looked around with beaming eyes and said, 'Everything is ready tip-top. It is as though we ourselves have come attired like the goddess Durga.' From that day the Mother stayed on till the eleventh day of the moon. She stayed in the southern portion of the garden house, north of the monastery. Along with her, there lived in that house Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Lakshmi Devi, and Bhanu-pisi.

On the second day of the worship, more than three hundred devotees bowed down before the Mother, one by one. She was sitting on her cot facing west. As each devotee touched her feet, she blessed him. Four persons

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1. According to Hindu belief, the gods and goddesses sleep for six months from summer solstice to winter solstice, waking up for six months on the latter day. As the Durga worship is celebrated in the first period, She has to be ceremonially awakened. This is done on the sixth day of the bright half of the lunar month. The actual worship takes place on the three succeeding days, and the image is immersed on the tenth day of the moon or the fourth day of the worship.

had their initiation on that day. The drama *Jana* was enacted that night, and on the night of the immersion ceremony was enacted the *Ramashwamedha*. The Mother witnessed both these performances from the upper storey of the monastery. After the third day's worship, Golap-Ma informed Swami Saradananda, 'Sarat, the Mother is highly pleased with your service and sends you her benediction.' The Swami, hardly knowing how to acknowledge that blessing, was deeply moved and exclaimed 'Indeed!'. And then looking meaningfully at Swami Premananda he added, 'Brother Baburam, did you hear?' The latter had heard it well enough; now in reply to Swami Saradananda's question he clasped him in a warm embrace.

On the tenth day of the moon, when the image was taken away on a boat for immersion in the Ganges, Dr. Kanjilal danced, gesticulated, and made faces at the image like a child, thereby evoking roars of laughter. But one of the Brahmacharis protested against these gestures and postures. The Mother was watching the whole scene from her own residence. When a monk drew her attention to the reaction of the puritanic Brahmachari, she said, 'No, no! All this is right. The goddess has to be entertained in every way through music, fun, and frolic.' The Mother returned to the 'Udbodhan' on October 22.

This was not either the first or the last visit of the Mother to the Belur Math during the Durga worship. She was there in Swami Vivekananda's time and also in 1916. With Belur she had a long association, and she had a love for the place. Many a time she had come there and stayed at the garden house of Nilambar Babu or at the rented house at Ghusuri; and all those places were sanctified by meditation and *japa*, religious discussion and practice, spiritual experiences and visions. In a reminiscent mood she said one day, 'Ah! How well I was at Belur! What a peaceful place it is! Meditation came naturally. And that is why Naren (Vivekananda) wanted to have a piece of land there.' It was not really Swami Vivekananda alone

who wished for a permanent residence there, the Mother's will also exerted its influence in bringing about that happy consummation. The monks were aware of this as also of the reality which had taken human form in the Mother, and hence they could not consider the worship of Durga a success unless She in Her human form came to the monastery to accept their adoration personally. At the commencement of the worship her name was ceremonially announced by the priest as the beneficiary of the celebration, and even to this day, that custom is being followed. The memories of the incidents connected with the Mother's presence at the Belur Math during those festivals are very inspiring to the monks and are treasured by them in their hearts. When the Mother came to the place of worship, the monks offered at her feet handfuls of flowers as they did at those of the Deity; and they did not consider their worship complete without such an offering. And during the celebration they kept their eyes fixed on her face; if she smiled, they thought that the goddess had accepted their worship. During one of these celebrations, Swami Brahmananda, the head of the monastery, worshipped her feet with one hundred and eight full-blown lotuses on the second day of the worship.

During the festival of 1916, the Mother came to Belur on the first day (*saptami*) of the worship, and lived in the garden house north of the monastery. Shortly after she had returned to her apartment after witnessing the worship, elders of the Math heard that as Radhu had fallen ill, the Mother would have to go back to Calcutta. Brahmachari Krishnalal who brought the message suggested to Swami Premananda to beg her to stay on. But the Swami replied, 'My boy, who dare dissuade the Great Mother! It shall be as She wills; we cannot do aught against Her wishes?' As a matter of fact, she did not go, for Radhu's condition improved, and the Mother gave up the thought of going. On the morning of the second day (*Ashtami*), she came to the courtyard of the monastery.

Nearby the inmates were dressing vegetables for the kitchen. At this the Mother remarked, 'The boys, I see, can dress vegetables well enough.' And Swami Jagadananda, who was also engaged in the work, said with a smile, 'Our object is to please the Great Mother, be that through spiritual practice or through dressing of vegetables.'

Some record of the worship that year has been preserved in a letter of Swami Shivananda, a portion of which we translate: 'Owing to the presence of the blessed Holy Mother, it has altogether been a direct worship (and not merely worship of the goddess in an image). Although there was continuous rain and storm on all the three days, yet by the Mother's grace, no part of the celebration suffered. And it even happened that just as the devotees sat for taking *prasada* the rain stopped. All were surprised at this. Afterwards it was learnt from Yogin-Ma that whenever the devotees sat for *prasada* and rain seemed to be imminent, the Mother sat down to make *japa* of Durga's name, and she prayed, "Dear me! How can so many people sit down to eat in this rain? Their leaf-plates and everything will certainly be washed away. Mother, save us!" And Mother Durga did indeed save. It happened likewise during all the three days.' After the Sandhi-puja (worship that is performed at the sacred moment of the junction of the eighth and ninth days of the moon) was over, Swami Saradananda said to a Brahmachari, 'Go and offer this guinea piece to the Mother and salute her.' The Brahmachari was not quite sure who was meant. He thought that the offering was to be made to the goddess. All the same he queried the Swami, who replied, 'Mother is there in that garden. Go and offer the guinea piece at her feet and salute her. It is she who has been worshipped here.'

For the convenience of the narrative we have skipped over the intermediate years to describe the two celebrations together. Let us now return to 1912. The Mother left

Calcutta a few weeks after the worship of Durga that year and arrived at Banaras on the 5th of November. After reaching the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama at Banaras at noon, she took a little rest and then went to Lakshmi-nivasa, the newly built house of the Dattas of Baghbazar, Calcutta; and here she stayed for two and a half months. In expectation of the Mother's coming the owners had ceremonially opened the house only a few days earlier. The Mother stayed in the first floor with Golap-Ma, Bhanu-pisi, Kedarnath Datta's mother, and Master Maha-shaya's wife and his sister-in-law; while Swami Prajna-nanda and other male devotees lived in the ground floor. The wide verandah of the house pleased the Mother and she remarked, 'We are indeed rather fortunate. A narrow place narrows down the mind, while a commodious place expands it.'

The very next day the Mother went to visit the Deities Vishwanatha and Annapurna in a palanquin. On the day following the worship of Kali (i.e., November 9), she visited the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, otherwise known as the Sevashrama, where Swamis Brahmananda, Shivananda and Turiyananda, Charu Babu (Swami Shobha-nanda), Dr. Kanjilal, and others were present. Kedar-baba (Swami Achalananda) accompanied her palanquin and showed her round. When she had seen every department, she sat down and in the course of a conversation with Kedar-baba expressed great delight at all the houses, gardens, etc., she had seen, and the good management she had noticed. She further added, 'The Master himself is present here and Mother Lakshmi (goddess of fortune) is here in all her majesty.' Then she wanted to know how the institution took shape and with whom the idea first originated. After hearing and seeing all about the institution she remarked, 'The place is so fine that I feel like staying on in Banaras.' Soon after she had reached her residence, somebody came with a ten-rupee note and handing it over to the head said, 'Kindly accept these ten

rupees as the Mother's donation to the Sevashrama.' That note is still treasured there as an invaluable asset.

That day a devotee asked the Mother at her residence, 'Mother, how did you find the Sevashramia?' She said calmly, 'I saw the Master himself present there, and that is why this work goes on here. These are all his work.' When this view of the Mother was communicated to Swami Brahmananda, he in his turn told it to Swami Shivananda. Just then Master Mahashaya was seen coming that way. His belief was that it was contrary to the Master's teachings to engage in that kind of social service without first realizing God through spiritual disciplines like *japa*, meditation, and austerity. Swami Brahmananda who knew his views, now set some devotees and Brahmacharis to ask him, 'Mother has said that the Sevashrama is the Master's work, and that the Master himself is present there. Now what do you say to that?' At Master Mahashaya's approach they crowded round him and put the question all in one voice, and the Swami too joined in. At this, Master Mahashaya smiled broadly and said, 'It can no longer be denied.'

Swami Brahmananda, in the course of his morning strolls visited the Lakshmi-nivasa and inquired about the Mother's health from Golap-Ma and sometimes made fun. One morning, as he came there, Master Mahashaya came out of his room and from the upper verandah Golap-Ma said, 'Rakhal, Mother asks you, why Sakti (Divine Energy conceived of as a woman) is worshipped first (before the male aspect)?'. Swami Brahmananda replied, 'It is because Mother has in her keeping the key to knowledge of Brahman. There is no other way unless Mother, out of compassion, unlocks the door with the key.' And he sang a song in the *baul* tune:

O mind, remain immersed in meditating the feet of Siva's wife;
Be immersed and avoid all misery.
All these three worlds are vain and in vain, you roam about.

Meditate within you the Coiled Energy that's of none but Brahman.
This is Kamalakanta's (poet's) message, 'Sing the glory of Mother Kali.
This indeed, is a stream of bliss; and paddle on slowly.'

As the song proceeded, he fell in the grip of a divine ecstasy and danced merrily; and at the end cried out, 'Ho, ho, ho!' and dashed out of the place. The Mother enjoyed this dance and afflatus from above, and below were Master Mahashaya and a few other devotees who also felt stirred to the depths by it all.

On the 28th of Agrahayana (December 14), she went out to visit the shrine of some of the gods and goddesses of Banaras. On another day when she came to the Tilabhandeshwara temples from the Vaidyanatha temple, she said of the Siva image at the former place that it was a natural one. Afterwards she went to the Kedarnath temple a little before dusk and attended the evening service after having a look at the holy Ganges. About Kedaranath she said, 'This Kedar and that (on the Himalayas) are the same — they are connected. If you see this one, you as well see the other. He is very much alive.'

She also visited the Sarnath ruins a few miles away. Miss MacLeod, who happened to be at a hotel in the cantonment area then, sent the hotel phaeton for her. But as it did not come in time, the Mother along with Radhu and Bhudev started away by a hackney carriage. When the phaeton came, Swami Brahmananda and some others proceeded by it to the same place. As the Mother was engaged it seeing the Buddhist ruins at Sarnath, she noticed some foreigners observing those things with evident astonishment, and she said, 'The people who constructed these things have come again; and struck with astonishment are remarking, "What wonderful things they made!" ' At the time of returning, Swami Brahmananda had it communicated to the Mother that he wanted her to drive in the phaeton, while he himself would ride in the carriage.

But the Mother protested saying, 'No, no. Rakhal (Brahmananda) and others came in that one, and they will ride back in it. I shall be all right in this one.' But she complied at last and drove ahead in the phaeton, while Swami Brahmananda and his companions followed in the carriage. When the Mother was out of sight, the hackney carriage turned turtle while negotiating a bend. The Swami was not hurt much; recovering from the fall he said merrily, 'Luckily the Mother did not travel by this carriage.' The Mother on hearing of the incident said, 'That accident was really in store for me, but Rakhal perforce diverted it to his own shoulders. Otherwise, what, with those young ones in my carriage, might not have happened!'

The Mother visited two holy men this time at Banaras—one of them was a follower of Sri Nanak, and the other was Chameli Puri. The former was new to the place and was seated on the bank of the Ganges. The Mother offered a rupee at his feet and saluted him. The grand old monk Chameli Puri was asked by her companion Golap-Ma, 'Who arranges for your food?' And the Puri replied with faith and warmth, 'It is Mother Durga alone who does; who else does?' The monk's faith and deportment pleased the Mother immensely and on returning home she said, 'Ah! The old man's face comes to my mind — it is so very like that of a child!' Next day she sent him some oranges, sweets, and a blanket. When on a subsequent day there was a talk of her going out to see more holy men, she remarked, 'What more holy men have I to see! For there indeed I have seen a holy man! Who else can there be?'

She had visited Banaras twice before, but she could not remain long. She took advantage of this long stay to hear the *Kashi-Khanda*[1] and visited more temples. She was present one day at the Ramakrishna Advita Ashrama during the enactment of the *Rasa-lila*[2]. As was the custom, she saluted the two boys who played the roles of Krishna

1. A mythological account of the glories of Banaras.
2. Boy Krishna's dance with the cowherd lasses of Vrindavan.

and Radha, by offering money at their feet. And she was followed in this by others. On another day, she sat there for two hours to hear the exposition of a portion of the *Bhagavata*. In addition Swami Girijananda went to her residence every afternoon to read to her the same book. On the 30th of December fell the birthday of the Mother, which was duly celebrated in her presence at the Advita Ashrama.

In the life of the Mother the two currents of spirituality and household affairs were so intermingled that for any new-comer it was difficult to separate the two or to comprehend their separate import. One day some local women visitors found the Holy Mother busy with Radhu and Bhudev, and in addition asking Golap-Ma to mend her cloth. Finding there only a repetition of their usual household scene, one of them could not help blurting out, 'Mother, I see, you are deeply engrossed in Maya.' 'What to do, my good girl,' answered the Mother, 'I am myself Maya.'[1] To be sure, the hint fell flat on the critic.

Another day, there came three or four women. The Mother was then seated on one side of the verandah, while Golap-Ma and others sat on the other side. As Golap-Ma appeared to be older and possessed of a more imposing personality, one of them saluted her and tried to enter into a conversation. Golap-Ma saw through the mistake and said, 'There sits the Holy Mother.' Not impressed by the simple appearance of the Mother, the woman thought that Golap-Ma was jesting with her; but when Golap-Ma repeated what she had said, the woman had to go to the Mother, who, however, was tempted to enjoy the fun and said with a smile, 'No, no, she indeed is the Holy Mother.' The woman was now in a fix — for both talked the same way, and there was no means of ascertaining the truth. So after some hesitation she decided to follow her first impulse and advanced towards Golap-Ma,

1. Maya may mean delusion, as also the Universal Mother who is its source. The latter is often called Mahamaya, the Great Maya.

who, however, rebuked her saying, 'Have you no judgment at all? Don't you notice whether it is a human or divine face? Does any human being appear like that?' The Mother had in reality something unique in her simple and yet placid look which revealed its supernormal character to any pure and discriminating mind. But how could that divine light be reflected on the dark and distracted minds which run after soridid worldly vanities?

The Mother left Banaras on the 2nd of Magha (January 16), 1913, and reached Calcutta the next day, where she remained for more than a month and then started for Jayrambati on the 11th of Phalguna (February 26), 1913.

23

IN A RURAL SETTING

After the opening of a railway station at Vishnupur, the Mother always travelled home via Vishnupur. At first she knew no one there and so she halted on the banks of either the Poka-bandh or the Lal-bandh, two of the big tanks there; and the cooking was done in some small way-side hut. Subsequently, when Swami Saradananda stayed there for two months in the second quarter of 1909, Sri Sureshwar Sen and his family became earnest followers of Sri Ramakrishna through contact with the Swami. From 1911 onward, the Mother usually rested for a while in their house, and sometimes stopped there for more than a day. The Master had once told her, 'My dear, Vishnupur is hidden Vrindaban; you must see it.' The Mother could not imagine at the time that Vishnupur would in due course become an important point on her way, and so she remonstrated, 'I am a woman; how can I see?' But the Master just said, 'No, my dear, you will see, you will.' Once, while passing through the town, the Mother visited the temple of the goddess Sarvamangala on the bank of the Lal-bandh, and she said, 'Verily! The Master's word has come true today.' Although Vishnupur has now lost its former importance, it still holds in its bosom the bright memories of its princes and unfolds before sympathetic visitor a bright chapter of Bengal's history in its old temples, and buildings, some of them in ruins now. The large tanks — Poka-bandh, Lal-bandh, and Krishna-bandh— strike one with wonder even in their present neglected state. The Mother used to enjoy her visits to Vishnupur.

In the middle of February 1913, the inmates of the Ashrama at Koalpara were informed that the Mother would shortly be visiting them. So, on the appointed day, the young inmates prepared to receive the Mother from a little beyond the borders of their place. As soon as the bullock-carts came into sight, one of the boys ran back to

the Ashrama to give those behind the happy news. Another boy walked with the Mother's cart and a little later he jumped up to the seat of the cartman and like an expert driver made the team of bullocks move very fast. The Mother was much amused at this and said smilingly, 'I see, you can drive the cart well enough, indeed. Well, it's good to learn all kinds of work.' The cart stopped at the Ashrama door, and the Mother was helped down by Kedar's mother; for, the prolonged sitting in the cart had made her rheumatic legs a little stiff. The devotees now saluted her one by one. Then she bathed in the Badujye-pukur and told the above-mentioned boy, 'You change your cloth for a bath towel and then pluck flowers and make arrangements for the worship.' The boy picked up the Mother's wet towel and went about his task. But Kedar's mother shouted to him, 'Hellow, my boy, why have you worn the Mother's towel? Change it, change it!' But the Mother said, 'What of that? What does it matter if a boy wears my towel. He is a boy: and boys are guileless.' And to the boy she said, 'Go and bring the flowers!'

When the flowers were brought, Kedar's mother selected the best of them for worship and the boy engaged himself in making sandal-paste for the worship, Brahmachari Kishori entered the kitchen, and Kedar carried on a conversation with the Mother. He said, 'Mother, all your sons are learned excepting a very few like us.' The Mother said tenderly, 'Fancy! The Master was not at all a learned man. The real thing is to have love for God. Methinks, many things will be accomplished on this side by you. What a lot these boys are doing for me. Why do you worry? The Master incarnated himself this time to save the rich, the poor, the learned, the ignorant, and all. I love you, you are my own boys.' After lunch she rested a little and then left that very day for Jayrambati in a palanquin.

As the rainy season of 1913 set in, malaria and dysentery spread widely in Jayrambati. In those days the

villagers got their mail twice a week from the post office at Anur, across the river Amodar, which at that time was in high flood, thus cutting off communication for a long time. The consequent absence of any news from the Mother caused deep anxiety in Swami Saradananda's mind, and he sent a messenger to her. He reported that the Mother was suffering from dysentery. A wire to that effect was sent from Kotulpur. As a result Dr. Kanjilal arrived with Sudhira Devi of the Nivedita School, and in a couple of days followed Yogin-Ma's sister Kali-dasi and Master Mahashaya's wife. Through their care and treatment the Mother came round in a few days. But, then, it became a problem for her to arrange for the comfort of so many guests from the city to whom a village during rains is most uninviting. The roads are then muddy, and vegetables and other fresh food-stuff difficult to procure. The Mother, therefore, told the Koalpara devotees very frankly that they alone could help her in this difficulty. The devotees responded cheerfully, and they not only supplied her with the necessary things, but also lent a hand in household duties. When the Mother was fully recovered, Dr. Kanjilal and Kali-dasi went back to Calcutta.

But owing to incessant work amid rain and sun, the Koalpara devotees fell ill with malaria. For about ten days the Mother did not hear from Koalpara and she feared that perhaps all the inmates had fallen ill. She knew too well the strict economy practised by the head of the Ashrama, and it made her all the more anxious. Therefore, she made inquiries through a woman and found that her apprehension was correct, the Ashrama inmates were all ill. Hence she sent a letter to Koalpara through the same woman again, which ran thus: 'Dear Kedar, I myself installed the Master there in the Ashrama. He liked parboiled rice, and ate nutritious food too. So I tell you, you will offer to the Master parboiled rice; and you shall not offer less than three curries, howsoever you may have to manage that. You cannot otherwise fight successfully with malaria."

On the 13th of Ashwina (September 28), 1913, the Mother went to Calcutta, and the next year she wrote back to Kedar, 'If you can have a house erected for me at Koalpara, I can stay there now and then when I go to the village. The difficulties in my brothers' families are ever on the increase; and I can't always endure them. There is no place for me to which I can move in case of illness or in some similar contingency.' Stimulated by this proposal, the Ashrama inmates built for her a small house in the compound of Kedar's old paternal home. The Mother had now at her disposal a self-contained household with three contiguous bedrooms, a separate kitchen shed, and other necessary conveniences. This was later on called the Jagadamba-Ashrama or the Ashrama of the Divine Mother.

On the 6th of Vaishakha (April 20), 1915, the Mother started for Jayrambati from Calcutta. She was overjoyed to see the new house, but said, 'I shan't be able to stay this time; there are too many (Radhu and Maku and their husbands, etc.,) with me. I shall take them all to Jayrambati, leave them there, and then come with Radhu to pass here a few days.' Then she left for Jayrambati.

Three months later, a date was fixed for her going to Koalpara. It was in the middle of the wet season. On the appointed day, it began pouring from early morning. The first reaction of the Ashramites was that it would not be proper to bring the Mother there in such weather; but ultimately they decided that at least for the sake of keeping their word they should follow the plan, leaving the choice of coming or not coming to the Mother herself. As soon as they fought their way to Jayrambati with a palanquin, uncle Kali brawled out, 'The monkeys that you are! You pose as sister's devotees! Kedar has, forsooth, a pig's brain! How wonderfully did Yogen Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) serve my sister; with what care Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) does everything! How wonderful is their devotion! And how could you think of coming to take her in this rain?' The Mother heard every word and

smiled as she looked at the devotees. Encouraged by the Mother's kindly looks, one of the Koalpara devotees said, 'Do we, in fact, possess the competence to take the Mother or serve her? It was settled beforehand that we should come with the palanquin today, and that is why we are here.' 'You can keep your word,' joined in the Mother with a broad smile, 'and can't I mine? You take me now; Radhu and others will go later on when they may.' The Koalpara devotees then admitted defeat and said, 'How can that be? When none can come out of the house in this shower, should we get you drenched by taking you out and thus make you ill?' That put uncle Kail also in good humour. And in the darkness of the night the palanquin went back the way it had come.

Next month the Mother went to Koalpara with her nieces Nalini, Maku, and Radhu, and Radhu's mother. But she could not stay there in the new house for more than fifteen days, as she had left Jayrambati in the month of Bhadra (August-September) which is inauspicious for a long sojourn.

The time for the Jagad-dhatri worship (November) now drew near. The man who was to be in charge of the store for the celebrations fell ill; and hence the Mother asked a Koalpara boy to take up the work. But as he was not a brahmin, she cautioned him thus: 'It will be all right if you are only a little careful so as not to touch prohibited articles.' Social restrictions were very stringent then; even today they are harder than in towns. Sister Nivedita once said to Shyamasundari Devi, 'Granny, shall I go to your village, enter your kitchen, and cook there?' But Grandmother replied, 'Don't my good grand-daughter; they will excommunicate us if you enter our kitchen.' Once when the *prasada* of Jagad-dhatri was being distributed among the brahmins by uncle Kali, a monk unwittingly approached him and put a ceremonial mark on his forehead after the performance of the *homa* (sacrifice). This enraged the brahmin landlords who left the place at once for fear of

losing caste. They turned a deaf ear to the Mother's entreaty; on the contrary, they extracted a fine of twenty-five rupees. Subsequently, Sri Lalitmohan Chatterji came to the village with a gramophone to entertain the villagers. This was a new thing in rural parts and attracted a good gathering including the people who had earlier extracted the fine. Lalitmohan thought that to be a good opportunity for taking vengence on those who had been so disrespectful to the Mother; and he threatened to shoot them unless the fine was paid back. Needless to say, the money was immediately repaid. For this and similar other exploits, Lalitmohan earned for himself the title of Kaiser among the devotees.

That was an ingenious little plan contrived personally by Lalitmohan. As for the Mother, she accepted all such restrictions in the field of social dealings; but amidst the devotees she tried to forget as much of them as possible. It was the family custom to worship Jagad-dhatri for three days instead of one; and on all days she went to the place of worship with her sisters-in-law to offer flowers at the feet of the goddess. On the night of the last day (Ekadasi), the monks sang in chorus the glory of the goddess. One of the songs pleased them very much and they repeated it more than once. It ran in part thus:

> None need worry any more as to how one will see the Mother;
> For, surely, She is not the mother of you or me, but of all in the Universe.

The Mother heard it all. Then she said to the boy devotee of Koalpara, 'Ah! The song created a deep fervour. Of a truth, how can the devotees really have caste? Children are all equal. I wish I could have them all seated round the same plate for food. But there is this little difficulty; this benighted land brags of caste. Anyway, no prohibition attaches to fried-rice. You will do one thing tomorrow — you will go to Kamarpukur, and bring four

pounds of *jilapi*[1] from the shop of Satya, the sweetmeat seller.' The *jilapi* came next morning at about nine. The Mother offered the sweets to the Master; and then putting some fried-rice on a big plate, arranged the *jilapis* round the heap of fried-rice. This was sent to the devotees who sat round the plate and merrily partook of the food, while the Mother tenderly watched from an adjoining room.

By and by the villagers came to recognize the devotees as a class by themselves. One day, she sat on the porch in front of the main door of the house. Some boys were playing in the open space in front. When some unknown devotees passed by the boys, one of them asked his companion, 'Who are they?' The other boy answered with a pose of wisdom, 'Why, they are devotees, don't you know?' And when the first boy wanted to know their caste, the wise boy repeated, 'Why, don't you know? — they are disciples.' The Mother overheard them and said, 'Mark you! What comes out of children's mouths is often enough quite true. They have taken it for granted that the devotees form a caste!'

One incident at the beginning of 1916 is not only very funny, but is also illustrative of the Mother's fortitude in circumstances of danger. At that time, Gauri-Ma once went by way Koalpara to see the Mother at Jayrambati. From Koalpara she picked up Brahmachari Varada as a companion. As she rested by the Amodar an idea flashed into her mind. When she approached the Mother's door at nightfall, she tied a turban round her head like a man and advancing a little inside the compound of the house cried out like a beggar, 'Mother, may it please you to give me alms, mother!' The mad aunt came out of the verandh and demanded, 'Who is that?' Gauri-Ma again begged in a pitiable tone, 'May it please you to give me

1. Flour is mixed with water to make a thin paste, which is pushed through a small round hole in boiling oil or butter to form into crisp, spiral coils, which are then soaked in syrup.

alms, mother!' Finding a man standing there at such an unusual hour[1], the mad aunt shrieked out, 'O dear sister-in-law', and she rushed to the Mother who walked out steadily and asked 'Who is that?'. Gauri-Ma kept standing where she was and repeated, 'May it please you to give me some alms, mother! I am a nocturnal beggar.' Gauri-Ma's voice revealed her identity to the Mother at once, and she said, 'O, it's you Gaur-dasi, come, come. When did you arrive?' All of them then joined in a hearty laugh, whereas the mad aunt hid herself in shame in a room and did not stir out.

Whenever the Mother came to Jayrambati, she took up her abode in the house of uncle Prasanna. But now her retinue was big, the number of devotees was ever increasing, and her uncle's family, too, was expanding. So the Mother's further residence there became inconvenient from many points of view. So, another home was built for her on the western bank of Punya-pukur, at a total expenditure of about two thousand rupees. At the north-west corner of this homestead was a south-facing mud cottage for the Mother; south of this and facing west was a similar cottage to serve as a drawing-room or for the annual worship of Jagad-dhatri; opposite the Mother's cottage was that of her niece Nalini and the women devotees; at the north-east corner was the kitchen; north of the last cottage, again, there was another cooking shed. The home was ceremonially opened on May 15, 1916. Along with the land purchased for this new home was bought the Punya-pukur, which after necessary excavation formed a part of the homestead. The Mother lived here for about four years.

The opening day of the house was marred by an unhappy incident. The devotees of Koalpara helped in every possible way in the building of the home and arranging for its opening. But they took so much to heart the insolence

1. Begging is done in the day-time, begging at night is almost non-existent.

of a few rich and honoured gentlemen who arrogated to themselves the leadership in connection with the opening celebrations that they decided not to be present on that day. The Mother did not fail to notice their absence and felt ill at ease. She inquiried about them, but got no explanation from any quarter. When a couple of days later they turned up carrying some necessities for the Mother's household, she asked them about their absence from the opening ceremony. Nalini Devi told her why they did not attend. The Mother knew now the cause of their keeping aloof, and she was also told that when she would go to Calcutta this time, those influential devotees would take her by way of Garbeta and not by way of Koalpara. At all this the Mother remarked, 'What impostors these are! The Koalpara boys there have built a post and have been keeping watch on the way for me and my devoted children. What trouble do they not face for our sake? Those others lack the capacity, and yet how they offend by their heedless words! And shall I have to go with all my companions by way of Garbeta, crossing all sorts of rivers and canals, just because such a one prefers it so? The Koalpara boys are my mainstay. Whatever anyone may say, I shall have to pass ever and anon through Koalpara.' This warm and affectionate talk of the Mother melted the hearts of the devotees; they knew that the Mother was a real mother.

Swami Saradananda was at Vrindaban at the time of the opening of the new home. He returned to Calcutta after a month and a half and then proceeded to Jayrambati to bring the Mother with him. The Mother had decided that the new house and some paddy fields purchased by her for Jagad-dhatri would be formed into a trust in the name of the goddess and the deed would be registered at Koalpara through the sub-registrar of Kotulpur. By that deed she would make the Belur Math responsible for the maintenance of the property and the continuance of the worship of the deity. After a brief stay at Jayrambati,

Swami Saradananda went with the Mother to Koalpara on July 6, 1916, and the deed was registered the next day according to plan. The courtesy shown to the sub-registrar by the Swami on this occasion underlined his attitude of stewardship of the Mother. The sub-registrar was a young Mohammedan, well below thirty years of age; yet the old Swami offered him cigarettes and fanned him, as though he (the Swami) was a common man. At last when the registration was over and the gentleman was sent off in a palanquin, he felt relieved.

That very night the party left for Vishnupur by bullock-carts. They arrived there in the morning and spent the whole day at Sureshwar Babu's house, from where they left for Calcutta by the night train. The Mother stayed at the 'Udbodhan' for about seven months and then started for Jayrambati on January 31, 1917. On the way she spent a couple of days at Koalpara.

This year the Jagad-dhatri worship was celebrated in the Mother's new home, and in her presence. Soon after the Durga festival, she kept on counting the days for the commencement of the other festival and saying, 'So many days are left. My mother used to make such and such preparation at this time; with what care did she do it all! Can you guess how things will be managed?' Ten days before the celebration, on the afternoon of the Kali worship, she said, 'My mother used to begin twirling off the wicks from today,' and she started making the wicks for the lights. On the day of worship, she went to the goddess again and again with the end of her cloth placed round her neck in token of extreme humility, and there she prayed with folded hands for the safe accomplishment of the ceremony. The priest was a Bhattacharya from Haldi-pukur, and the *tantradharaka* was the family guru[1] of her brothers. At the end of the worship the Mother saluted the guru and placed the dust of his feet on her head. When she approached

1. Spiritual teachership was hereditary, and still continues to be so in many cases, though the custom seems to be dying out.

the priest with a similar purpose, he drew back and expostulated, 'Mother, how is it that you make obeisance to us? Do, please bless us.' The family guru seemed to have come to his senses now; but instead of showing any modesty he supported his pose of superiority by quoting a Sanskrit verse which means, 'I salute that blessed guru through whom has been revealed the Reality by which is pervaded this whole spherical universe of sentient and insentient things.' The Mother lent support by saying, 'That's true to be sure,' and left the place.

Next morning, Lalu, the fisherman of Satbere, came and said, 'Dear aunt, I shall sing some *baul* songs.' The Mother did not agree and pointed out various inconveniences; but Lalu assured her that he himself would get together the canopy, the lantern, and such other paraphernalia, for which none else need take any trouble. The Mother still pleaded, 'Lalu, why should you invite the ridicule of people? Much better will it be if you simply sit before the goddess and sing to her a few songs.' But Lalu stuck to his plan. In the evening he spread out the canopy, hung up the lantern, wore the long robe of the *bauls*, and faced the audience with a small drum dangling from his shoulder. And then he sang some humorous songs, made all roar with laughter, and left the place triumphantly.

The Mother's health deteriorated soon after; and in January 1918, her temperature rose very high. As soon as Swami Saradananda knew of this, he started with his brother Dr. Satishchandra Chakravarty, Dr. Kanjilal, Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Sarala Devi[1], and others and reached Jayrambati on January 21. The Mother said that she would take Kanjilal's medicine. That done, she recovered

1. As a little girl, she came to be known to Sister Nivedita and Sudhira Devi of the Nivedita School. At the age of nine or ten years, she met the Mother for the first time in her rented house on the Baghbazar Street; and from 1913 up to the passing away of the Mother she accompanied and served her at various periods and in diverse places as opportunity arose.

soon. But, perhaps, the greater result came from the presence of her beloved ones — the Swami and his companions. By getting them down to stay near herself and by being constantly engaged in thoughts of their comfort, she shook off the disease.

Some little trouble cropped up at Jayrambati at this time. To suppress all political activity in the country, the Government had arranged for a strict and elaborate police vigilance. They watched the movements of all people, and came to the Mother's house to note down the names and whereabouts of all new-comers. Among the Mother's disciples could be counted some internees; moreover, the frequent visits of East Bengal people raised the suspicion of the police all the more. In the police records the Mother's house was noted down as 'Mataji's (Mother's) Ashrama', which required close attention. The Koalpara Ashrama, too, shared a similar fate. This caused great anxiety to the Mother, and to remedy this Sri Bibhutibhushan Ghosh, a disciple of the Mother, brought to her house a superior police officer from the district headquarters to have personal acquaintance with the actual state of things. The officer was highly impressed by the courtesy and affection of the Mother, and when taking leave inquiried whether she was afraid of the police. Bibhutibhushan tried to evade the question just to save the Mother from giving an unpleasant direct answer. But she said frankly, 'There is fear, to be sure, my son.' The police officer promised to ease the situation; and as a matter of fact, the police relaxed their surveillance after this visit. They now remained satisfied with noting down names and collecting general information, and the local sub-inspector of police held the Mother in great honour. When Swami Saradananda arrived at Jayrambati, the village watchman (*chaukidar*) came to note down the names of the whole party. And lest any negligence on their part should embarrass the Mother later on, Swami Saradananda saw to it that all information was scrupulously supplied.

The Swami had planned to take the Mother with him to Calcutta; but the Mother declined; and so he left Jayrambati leaving behind Sarala Devi for the Mother's service and another devotee to accompany the Mother to Calcutta in case she should change her mind. But when even after a fortnight there was no indication of such a change this devotee also took leave of her.

On the eve of the Sivaratri day (some time in late February) 1918, the village watchman Ambika came with the information that on the morrow the sub-inspector of the Shiromanipur police station would visit the Mother's house. Some time earlier Swami Jnanananda, who had been suffering from malaria, had gone to Katihar to Dr. Aghornath Ghosh's house to be treated by him. While staying there he got information of the Mother's illness at Jayrambati and visited her there. On his return to Katihar, the police falsely concluded that Swami Jnanananda was none other than a brother of Dr. Aghornath who had been absconding for political reasons and was now living incognito in the doctor's house under a monk's garb. And thus a silly but vigorous investigation was set in motion for ascertaining the antecedents of Jnanananda. Ambika said that the talks at the police station indicated that the sub-inspector's visit was only a part of that inquiry. That in itself was a simple affair; but nobody could be too sure of the whims of the all-powerful police of those dark days, particularly in the face of the Sindhubala incident which had happened in a nearby village some time back. But though the Mother's household was thus perturbed over the prospect of a visitation from the police, in the Mother's face could be seen absolute peace and assurance; and others, too, kept fairly calm for the being. At night also the Mother sat by her sons at meal-time, as usual, and she seemed totally unexcited.

Fortunately, Sri Manindranath Bose, a lawyer of Arambagh and a disciple of the Mother, came to see her the next day. The Mother was pleased to see him; and

her attendant told him everything concerning the forthcoming police inquiry. The sub-inspector came at sunset with his constables, and Manindranath entered into a conversation with him. In the meantime the Mother sent word from the inner apartment that she had arranged for a little refreshment for them. So Manindranath and the sub-inspector went in, saluted the Mother, and ate heartily what she placed before them. The police officer was overjoyed at the Mother's tender consideration for him and ended the investigation in a most friendly manner.

The Mother had not gone to Calcutta, but had stayed on at Jayrambati; and the Koalpara people pleaded that it would please them immensely and would do her health some good if she lived with them for some days. The Mother readily consented and went to stay there for about two months, returning to Jayrambati on the 15th of Vaishakha (April 30), 1918. According to the Mother's direction, Brahmachari Varada lived at Jayrambati during her absence. One noon, at about eleven, on reaching the Jagadamba-Ashrama (Mother's quarters at Koalpara) he found the place rather agitated. On inquiry he learnt that the Mother was in a state of spiritual ecstasy — she had lost consciousness while uttering 'Master'. When they sprinkled water on her face and eyes and she came to the normal plane, Nalini Devi asked her, 'Dear aunt, why was it so?' The Mother replied, 'Why, what did you see? That's nothing. My head reeled all of a sudden as I was passing the thread through the eye of the needle." Long after, during her last illness at the 'Udbodhan', the Mother said to Varada with reference to this incident, 'I had come with a weak body from Jayrambati and was one day sitting on the verandah. A little away, Nalini and others were busy in some sort of sewing. The sun was high up — quite glaring. I saw, as though the Master entered by the main entrance, seated himself on the cool verandah, and at once lay down. At this sight I hurried to spread for him the end of my cloth when I felt a strange

sensation. Kedar's mother and others raised a hue and cry; and so I told them, then, that it was nothing.' The Mother had visions of the Master at Koalpara even after the incident narrated here; for during the same conversation with Varada, she added, 'I had such high temperature at Koalpara that I lay on my bed unconscious and unmindful of decorum. But whenever I came to my senses and called on him (the Master) for the sake of this body, I had his vision.'

Towards the end of her stay at Koalpara she had an attack of malaria with high temperature which rose to 103° at noon. This was too much for her weak and frail body to bear. When the fever rose, she felt a burning sensation on her palms and groped for something cool to lay them on. But as ice was not available, her hands were often placed on some one's cool bare body. During the height of the fever she inquired about Swami Saradananda who was then in Calcutta. As the fever did not abate, he was informed by wire to which he responded by sending Dr. Kanjilal with attendants for the Mother, and he himself followed them to Koalpara on April 17, with Dr. Satish Chakravarty and Yogin-Ma. The Swami went from the carriage straight to the Mother's bed-side and sat quietly near her head. The temperature was then going up, and the Mother seemed to be feeling for something. The Swami learnt on inquiry that she wanted something cool to lay her hands on. He removed his shirt at once and placed her hands on his cool bare body. The Mother getting relief thereby, said, 'Ah!' and looked up at the Swami, but contrary to her habit, she did not draw her veil, so that the people present concluded that she did not fully recognize the Swami owing to her semi-conscious state, for she was known for her shyness before him. The fever left the next day and she took solid food on April 21, when Dr. Kanjilal left.

The Mother gradually gathered strength; and, then, Swami Saradananda said one morning, 'Mother, we are

not going to leave you behind this time—we shall take you to Calcutta with us.' The Mother did not object, but said, 'But my son, I shall have to go to Jayrambati once to re-start on an auspicious day.' So she went with others to Jayrambati on April 29. As the news of her return spread, the village women flocked there and said, 'Mother, we had almost despaired of seeing you again. It gives us great joy to find you back here with all others.' The Mother said, 'Yes, mother. I suffered very much because of the disease. But then Sarat, Kanjilal, and others came up, and through the grace of Simhavahini, I am spared this time. Sarat asks me to go to Calcutta. If you all agree, I can go and come back after recouping a little.' All heartily welcomed the proposal.

During the Mother's illness at Koalpara, Radhu had, of her own accord, left all of a sudden for her husband's home at Tajpur. The Mother now sent a messenger to ascertain whether she would go to Calcutta. Radhu declined the offer.

The Mother was to stay at Jayrambati for about a week. On the day before leaving the village, it began to rain heavily when the monks and Brahmacharis sat for their food, the Mother serving them. As the rain splashed on the verandah where they sat, Swami Saradananda drew together all the leaves to a safer place on the west and arranged for a joint lunch from a common heap. The junior Brahmacharis naturally felt somewhat ill at ease in eating jointly with such an august person as the Swami; but his insistence and the happy smile on the Mother's face encouraged them.

On May 5, 1918, the Mother went to Koalpara and had a day's rest there. On the morrow she left for Vishnupur in a carriage and reached Calcutta on the morning of May 7.

One of the saddest events in the Mother's life during her stay at this time at the 'Udbodhan' was the passing away of Swami Premananda on July 30. Her eyes were

wet from the morning of that sorrowful day; and when in the afternoon came the stunning news of his departure, she wept bitterly and said, 'Baburam (Premananda) was so very near to my heart! All the energy, devotion, and wisdom of the Belur Math were impersonated in the form of my Baburam and walked there on the bank of the Ganges.' Recovering a little from the first shock, she laid her head at the feet of the Master's large picture in the middle room and cried out with a heart-rending wail, 'Master, so you have snatched him away!' At this scene none present could check his or her tears.

24

RADHU

Radhu's health and behaviour were quite good in her early years. Her childlike simplicity pleased everybody. She had no worry for the future and no attraction for money. To her the Mother was 'Mummy', and her own mother, 'Bald mummy', for the mad aunt had her hair cropped short. As the Holy Mother distributed her things rather liberally, Radhu's mother became jealous, and sometimes cantankerously rapped out, 'She is giving away everything; what will happen to Radhi in future?' And sometimes she harangued to her daughter, 'The sister-in-law is giving away everything to others; she is not laying by anything for you. Why do you stay on there? Come away to my room.' Radhu showed her annoyance at such advice gratis and scolded and motioned her 'Bald mummy' away. She needed little; for the Mother gave her plentifully. She loved those gifts, to be sure. But if others had a share of the Mother's bounty and clung to their presents, Radhu had no reason to be envious.

She was very good-natured indeed. But as ill luck would have it, she fell ill; and after her marriage, her temper degenerated in proportion as her health deteriorated. Noticing this the Mother once said to Kedar, 'What shall I tell you, my son? Formerly she was quite good. But nowadays she has become physically weak; and on top of everything she is married! Now I am afraid that she might ultimately turn mad as she is born of an insane mother. Have I after all brought up a lunatic?' In reality the Mother had to put up with not a little worry and suffering because of Radhu, although she had accepted her whole-heartedly at the bidding of the Master who indicated in a vision that Radhu was none other than Yoga-maya come down to provide a downward pull for the Mother's mind which would otherwise be lost

in lofty spiritual flight. Indeed, Radhu was fast tending to be a problem-girl and a source of worry and anxiety to the Mother. She became increasingly irascible and incoherent in talk. This becomes clear from some of the casual remarks of the Mother. When a woman devotee proposed to bring up a boy, the Mother drew her attention to her own condition owing to Radhu and said, 'Don't take up such a burden. Do your duty by every one; but love none but God. One has to suffer much if one loves.' On another occasion she said, 'Don't you see, how I suffer because of Radhu?' And with deeper regret the Mother said at the 'Udbodhan' one day, 'Do you notice, my daughter, how strange is this play of the Master? What a fine lot he has made of my mother's family. See what kind of company I have to keep. As for this one (Radhu's mother) she is rank mad; another (Nalini) is verging on insanity. And see there's another still (Radhu)! My daughter, what a strange being I brought up! She has not an iota of intelligence. She is standing there holding the railing—watching for her husband's return. She is afraid in her mind, lest he should get in where that music is going on. She is vigilant day and night. What an attachment, my daughter! I never knew that she would have so much attachment.'

Radhu really served two purposes in the Mother's life—on the one hand she acted like a bond binding her heart to this world, and on the other she supplied a background for the expression of her motherly qualities. The greatness that manifested itself in the midst of the currents and cross-currents of this world could not otherwise have been easily comprehended. Greatness that is heightened by exceptionally favourable circumstances may evoke the comment from the householders, 'We have nothing to learn from it; for we cannot hope to command such ideal conditions.' And, again, when the monks praise absolute detachment from worldly preoccupations, some wiseacres may laugh in their sleeves and say, 'These people know

nothing of the pleasures of this world, and yet conjure up a doleful picture of the world before their mind's eye to condemn it for no fault of its own.' The Holy Mother's life is full of meaning for either kind of critics. For she accepted the world *in toto* and played her game in it faultlessly. Her words are all soaked in life's experience; and yet every move she makes, sends forth bright rays of a light beyond.

In the second week of June 1918, Radhu had a boil on her finger; and she wanted to go to the Mother at Calcutta. The Mother, therefore, wrote to Kedar of Koalpara that Radhu would be proceeding to Calcutta with her mother and husband, and that if Radhu should so desire, Brahmachari Varada should be permitted to accompany the party. Radhu did, of course, want Varada; and he, too, travelled with them. When Radhu recovered, Varada escorted her mother back to Jayrambati. He had to proceed to Calcutta again in the beginning of winter when Radhu's mother wanted to see her daughter who was ailing there.

On December 31, 1918, Swami Shivananda announced at the Belur Math that Swami Saradananda had sent word about the Holy Mother's coming to the Math with Radhu that very afternoon, and that she would live in the adjoining northern garden house, which should accordingly be tidied up. Radhu was in the family way, and her nerves had become so sensitive that she could not bear any sound. The Mother had chosen that quiet house with the idea that it would soothe Radhu's nerves. But that very day further news came that Radhu would not be coming; for she had calculated that the Belur Math would really be a noisy place for several reasons: just on the border of the garden house was located the Math chapel where during worship they would ring bells. In the evening they would sing hymns to the accompaniment of musical instruments; in front there was the Ganges over which plied a number of steamers which have their screaming sirens; and near

at hand was the birthday celebration of Swami Vivekananda, which was bound to attract a large number of devotees. The Mother had, therefore, to go to a comparatively quieter place in the city—the boarding house of the Nivedita Girls' School! The very next morning Swami Shivananda sent Brahmachari Varada to inquire about the Mother's comforts. Finding him, the Mother said dismally, 'Here I am at last in this sea of trouble. I don't know, Varada, what is in store. And yet wait and see how long after all she continues here. Radhu is in bed all the time; her heart can bear no sound. I don't know, my boy, what disease it is! The Master alone knows how she will be saved.'

After a few days the Mother said, 'Can you imagine? Radhu doesn't like even this place any longer. She says, "Let's go to the country." But you know her condition well enough. Is there any good doctor or Kaviraj to be had in the country? What a lot of advantages we have here. But she will always have her own way. Let us wait and see how things shape themselves.' On the birthday of Swami Vivekananda it was rumoured at the Belur Math that the Mother would be going to her village home the next day. Varada was duly sent for; he would have to accompany the Mother. When the Brahmachari reached the 'Udbodhan', he found the Mother busy packing up. At the sight of Varada, she said gloomily, 'I am going to the country to drift in this unfathomable sea (meaning Radhu). You all will be my mainstay there. Sort out these articles properly, pack and bind them up securely. Nothing has been arranged so far. I was waiting for you till now.' When Varada got down late at night after finishing the packing, Swami Saradananda told him, 'It's my wish that you should stay with the Mother as long as she needs you.' Varada readily agreed, and continued to be at her service till the last day of her life.

Next morning the Mother started by train for Vishnupur with Radhu and Radhu's mother, Nalini Devi and

Maku, the widow (Mandakini Roy) of Navasan[1], and others. Two monks escorted them up to Vishnupur, where they lodged at the house of Sri Sureshwar Sen. Next morning at tea-time, Sureshwar brought a young man of about twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age and introduced him saying, 'This is a good astrologer who has his home here. In Calcutta he studies under and lives with a teacher who is a noted astrologer.' This aroused everybody's interest, and each wanted the marks on his or her palm to be interpreted. Reading Radhu's palm the astrologer predicted, 'She won't have an easy delivery.' And studying Maku's palm he foretold, 'Several successive children of hers will not meet each other.' At this Maku hustled to the Mother and began to cry. The Mother consoled her in many ways and then calling the astrologer to herself told him, 'My boy, you are still young. If you had noticed such a portent, it would have been much better to have told us of it apart. Be that as it may, you now tell me of some remedy that you may have in your astrology. If I don't do any such thing how can I pacify Maku? And then let the Lord's will be done.' The astrologer said, 'According to us, she should now either read the *Chandi* or hear it read for three consecutive Tuesdays; and then there should be a *homa* and other auspicious rites.' Maku's son Neda was then two and a half years old, and he was very healthy, intelligent, and lovable. And Maku expected another child in a couple of months. So the prophecy of the astrologer had a very depressing effect on everybody.

Early in the morning on January 29, 1919, the party left in six bullock-carts and after reaching Jaypur at a distance of eight miles halted for cooking for the noon.

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1. She was married in a Kayastha family of Navasan, a village within the Goghat police station of the Hooghly district and only a few miles away from Kamarpukur and Jayrambati. She had no issue and her husband died early. She became a disciple and then an attendant of the Mother. In the Mother's household she was known as the daughter-in-law of Navasan. For convenience we refer to her as 'the widow.'

The rice was being boiled in an earthen pot. When it was ready and the cook wanted to take it down for removing the gruel, the vessel burst and fell down. This created a real problem, for such food could not be offered to the Master, and cooking again would mean great delay. But the Mother remained undisturbed. She carefully removed the rice from the top of the scattered heap to some leaves and adroitly separated the gruel from it. Then she washed her hands and brought out the picture of the Master from her box. Along with the rice she served some curry and lentil soup for the Master and said with folded hands, 'This is how you have ordained it today. Now take some warm food without delay.' The Mother's talk and movements set all laughing; but nothing perturbed, she said calmly, 'I have to adjust according to time and circumstances. Come now, do you all sit down for food.' The carts restarted as soon as all had finished taking their food. But they could not reach Koalpara before eleven o'clock in the night.

According to a previous plan, the Mother was to remain at Koalpara for a day or two; but the solitude of the village brought sound sleep to Radhu, and she insisted on continuing there. And in consultation with uncle Kali and others, the Mother also concluded that all things taken together, Koalpara was preferable to Jayrambati. Accordingly, from that time till the 7th of Shravana (July 22), 1919, the Mother stayed on at the Jagadamba-Ashrama at Koalpara. For the reader's help we should add here a few words about the locality.

The Ashrama at Koalpara stands on the main road from Kotulpur to Desra on way to Jayrambati. The Jagadamba-Ashrama, where the Mother lived, was at the farthest end of the village, and about a furlong east of the monastery. This homestead was in a solitary place and was surrounded by high walls. The cottage meant for the Mother was spacious and had a cemented floor. Near it was the kitchen. A big cottage at the south-east corner

could accommodate seven or eight women devotees. And another cottage at the south-west corner served as a waiting room for the men devotees who came to see the Mother in the day-time. On the inner verandah of this cottage was a husking machine. South of this group of cottages, at a distance of about fifty yards, was Kedar's dwelling house. Before the Jagadamba-Ashrama was built, the Mother used to reside here when passing through Koalpara. These latter precincts had a big cottage facing east; east of that was the small family chapel of Kedar. On the north was a cowshed; and the whole place was surrounded by a wall, outside which, on the east and south, were thick bushes of thorny plants; on the west was a small pond, and on the north some quince and tamarind trees. It was a somewhat isolated homestead. Even so, Radhu selected this dreary place for her residence.

Many monks and devotees came to Koalpara as they found the Mother more easily accessible here than in Calcutta. All the men had their food at the main Ashrama, while the women had theirs at the Jagadamba-Ashrama. The total number of inmates at both the places often rose to as high as forty.

After spending there just a few days, the Mother said to Brahmachari Varada, 'Something has happened to me lately—whatever thought arises in my mind comes true, be it good or bad. Radhu has taken a fancy to this wild jungle, for it is quiet. But it strikes me that though you may have to go out on business throughout the day-time, you should remain here with me from evening and have your food here. I am rather nervous here, my boy! I have told (Brahmachari) Rajen, too; he will be able to come at about ten or eleven after finishing his work at the Ashrama.' From that day on, Varada returned every evening and sat on a cot under the quince in front of Radhu's cottage. The Mother, too, came and talked in a low tone; for Radhu then lay in her bed and could not bear to hear any sound whatever. The slightest noise set her heart beating

fast. And hence all metallic things—the handles of buckets, door chains, etc.,—had cotton wrappings round them. One day the Mother said, 'Look here, how thick this jungle is! I shouldn't wonder if someday a bear should make its appearance here.' Varada assured her that that part of the country was free from bears. Yet the Mother added, 'Who knows, my boy? How dark it is here! I am afraid.' In a day or two, it was actually reported that in the field of Desra, only a mile away, a huge bear had appeared and mauled to death an old woman as she was picking up cow-dung, and that the beast, too, had been shot dead. In the evening the Mother said, 'So you see what a horrible thing the bear has done today! They say that it has killed the mother-in-law of Ambika (the village watchman). Yet did you not assert that there were no bears in these parts?'

As suggested by the astrologer of Vishnupur, many auspicious rites were gone through for a whole week for warding off the evil portent from Maku. And then in the evening the Mother sat under the quince and said, 'What a lot of difficulties I had to live in at the Nahabat for the service of the Master; and yet there was no consciousness of any inconvenience, the day passed off merrily without any notice. And here I am now in all sorts of trouble because of these people. The rites for Maku's solace are over today. I am sitting here with you in the jungle to the detriment of all my religious practices, *japa*, and penances. And now I should thank my lot if, through God's grace, nothing untoward happens to Radhu.' As the talk went on, the widow of Navasan came up and said, 'O brother, did you hear? At noon today, I was sitting here on the verandah with the Mother; all was quiet. The Mother said, "Those two crows used to come here till a few days ago to perch on yonder tree and caw. This irritated Radhu. But, well, for some days now they haven't been seen." Hardly had the Mother finished than the crows came and cawed from the tree.' The Mother smiled and corroborated the story saying 'Yes, my boy.'

In the middle of June 1919, it had rained heavily for some days, when one night, at about ten o'clock, they sat under the tree. The Mother said all of a sudden, 'Look here, that lunatic of Shihar has not been coming here for a long time. He is stark mad. But he is good at singing, for instance. But I am afraid, my boy, lest he should begin shouting.' The widow of Navasan protested, 'Why, again, do you mention him, Mother? Suppose he pops out at this dead of night!' The Mother replied, 'Who knows, my daughter! And what an apprehension you have! How can he come crossing the river in this rainy season?' Before silence had dropped over her words, the lunatic made his appearance with a bundle of vegetables under his arm and a large hat of palm leaves on his head. He said to the Mother, 'Here I am with some vegetables for you.' The widow of Navasan ran to a room and bolted the door. The Mother said softly, 'Go away, don't you make any noise at this late hour of the night.' He replied, 'How can I go now? The river is in flood!' 'Then how did you come?' queried Varada. 'I crossed by swimming,' replied the man. The Mother again said in a very persuasive and sweet voice, 'My good man, don't you create any disturbance.' The man at once left the place calmly and slowly. After this event the Holy Mother had a fairly quiet time there.

Radhu's disease, however, showed no sign of improvement, rather it worsened day by day. Sympathetic people were not wanting, each of whom had a remedy to prescribe. The Mother politely listened to them all, and in all possible cases acted up to those suggestions, for she did not want to offend anybody if that could be helped. In the beginning of March 1919, Nalini Devi said, 'Mind you, aunt, when Radhu's mother became mad, it was you who made her wear the bangle of the "Mad Kali" of Tirol; and only then did she come round. I think, Radhu also will fully recover if she wears the bangle. She also has got a touch of insanity; otherwise how could she be sleeping all the

time like that, though she is quite normal so far as food and such things are concerned.' Accordingly, the Mother sent some one to Tirol, seventeen miles away, to bring the bangle after offering due worship to Kali there. As the bangle arrived at night, it was kept hanging on a tree, for it was not to touch the ground. Next morning Radhu wore it; but there was no result, except that Radhu's mother became all the more quarrelsome and went on abusing Nalini Devi without rime or reason. After a few days, the mad aunt told the Mother, 'Why did you bring Radhu here from Calcutta? It would have been far better in Calcutta. Here it is hot; and Radhu would recover if ice could be applied.' To pacify the aunt, the Mother hap ice brought from Vishnupur. As this was being applied to Radhu's head, uncle Kali turned up and said, 'Sister, what a pity that you consented to apply ice on the advice of that mad woman to an enceinte's head! God be thanked, if the cold does not produce something worse. Sister, you don't understand; it's no disease at all, for otherwise the big doctors of Calcutta would not have failed. She is perhaps possessed by some god or ghost. At Sushnegede there is a Chandal[1] who is an adept in the *tantrika*[2] cult. Why should we not get him to try his skill on her?' The ice pack was then given up, and uncle Kali was asked to bring the *tantrika* adept. As the uncle and Varada reached the man's place, he scattered some mustard seeds over their bodies and declared solemnly, 'Yes, I have understood it all; I have got the command, I shall have to go there in a day or two.'

As the *tantrika* arrived the following afternoon, the Mother saluted him with the greatest humility and described Radhu's condition with tearful eyes in a way as though the *tantrika* alone could save her from the insur-

1. A man of a very low caste.

2. Tantras are scriptures associated in popular belief with occult practices which are supposed to bestow supernormal powers to their followers, the *tantrikas*.

mountable difficulty in which she was placed. The man was satisfied on examination of the patient that it was a genuine case of supernatural influence. But the remedy that he prescribed was altogether beyond the competence of anyone to procure. The oil and liver of a *rohita* fish (*cyprinus rohita*, carp) weighing more than forty pounds were to be boiled in the oil extracted from black gingili seeds by grinding them in a village oil-press; and with these were to be cooked iron, various scented articles, the dung of a bull, and such other ingredients to be picked up from various inaccessible places. The resulting ointment had to be rubbed on Radhu's body, and she had to wear an amulet. The Mother evinced the greatest interest at first; but when it became clear that it was a wholly absurd prescription, she became despondent and said, 'There's no gainsaying that I am reverential to all the deities and am craving their favour; but none is kindly disposed. It'll be as the Lord wills, as it is written on Radhu's forehead (by the fingers of Destiny)! Master, you are the only saviour!' This mood of absolute dependence on Providence renders the Mother extraordinarily attractive.

On the advice of some well-wishers, the Mother also agreed to invoke the help of a *Chanda* (a fierce spirit) through adequate rites. In an abandoned shed outside the Ashrama, the *Chanda* was duly summoned by charms, worship, and sacrifice. In the consequent seance the spirit prescribed many queer medicines and gave directions for procuring an oil from the demonologist's house. Everything was done. But Radhu's ailment defied all these attempts at treatment.

Out of a sense of duty and for the solace of all the Mother had many such things done. And yet her faith in Providence never wavered, and her detachment never flickered. One day, when somebody proposed that for Radhu's safe delivery a certain doctor should be called in, she revealed her real mind by saying, 'Aren't the bitches and vixens of the forests delivered of their litter?'

In the middle of May 1919, news reached Koalpara that the mother of the widow of Navasan lay ill at home without any hope of recovery and without anybody to nurse her. The Mother had her brought to Koalpara and sent for doctor Prabhakar Mukherji of Arambagh, a disciple of hers. The doctor came; but the old woman did not live for long. She breathed her last a few days later.

In the meantime two events had happened: the first was the death of Maku's son Neda on April 20, 1919. This boy of extraordinary qualities was a pet of the Mother, and the blow caused extreme grief. The second event was Radhu's giving birth to a child without any accident. Her protracted neurasthenia had led doctors to opine that an operation might be necessary at the time of delivery; and hence at the bidding of Swami Saradananda, Dr. Vaikuntha (afterwards Swami Maheshwaranda) and Sarala Devi proceeded to Koalpara. But everyone was surprised to see Radhu give birth to a son on the 24th of Vaishakha (May 9), without much trouble. Radhu, however, continued ailing even after this, and her nervous troubles was somewhat aggravated. Neda's death followed by this set-back in Radhu's condition completely overwhelmed the Mother; she wept as she talked of these things. After the death of the mother of the widow of Navasan, Dr. Mukheri came to take leave of the Mother and said with folded hands, 'Mother, the world is full of sorrows. There's no escape since I am already in it! Mother, how can we get peace? The world is quite galling to me!' The Mother said very sympathetically and with tears in her eyes, 'True enough, my son, there's no joy in the world. The Master is our only refuge. But, my son, it is a great sin to lead a worldly life or to live with one's relatives. I committed a blunder by getting Radhu married and now I am suffering.'

The Mother had at first fixed the 4th of Shravana (July 19), 1919, as the date for going to Jayrambati. But as it rained heavily, she went there only on the seventh of

Shravana. For some seven or eight months following child-birth, Radhu remained so weak that she could not stand up or walk. She simply crawled along; and she did not wear any clothes, so that her dwelling place had to be screened off with cloth. At times she became so intractable that she had to be forcibly carried to her bed. Some thought that it was all sheer madness; while others believed it to be real weakness. And to crown it all, she had become addicted to opium and pestered the Mother for increasing the dose. The Mother tried all the while to cure her of this by stages; but Radhu would not agree. Recently the Mother had been in poor health, and to add to her suffering there were all these additional troubles. One day the Mother was dressing vegetables, when Radhu approached her. The Mother knew her motive and, therefore, argued with her, 'Radhi, why do you continue thus? Stand up straight now; I am fed up with you. I am going to lose my religious practices, duties, money, and all for your sake. Can you tell me from where to meet all these expenses?' Radhu became furious at this and taking up a big egg-fruit from the basket in front, struck at the Mother's back with all her might. As it fell with a thud, the Mother bent her back in pain and the place became red and swollen. But unmindful of this, she turned to the Master and prayed with folded hands, 'Master, don't be offended at her; she is ignorant.' Then taking the dust of her own feet in hand, she rubbed it over Radhu's head and said, 'Radhi, the Master never uttered a harsh word against this body, and you inflict such pain on it! How can you evaluate my worth? How lightly do you mean to deal with me just because I have chosen to live amidst you all?' Radhu then began to weep. And the Mother continued, 'Radhi, if I become offended, then you can find no shelter anywhere in the three worlds. Master, don't be offended with her.'

Sometimes before Radhu's son was born, a strange transformation had been creeping over her demeanour;

and just then the Mother was getting ready for her final departure — there were only two and a half years left for the concluding of that divine drama. The devotees had heard that the day when the Mother's heart would be detached from Radhu, there would remain no means to arrest its natural gravitation towards the state beyond all worldly encumbrances. Then the curtain would drop on her playing her part as a human being. Now through the wishes of Sri Ramakrishna, those affectionate cords which tied her to this world seemed to be snapping one by one.

The Mother's mind had been getting detached from Radhu for the last few years. Even in her early age Radhu had contracted diseases, and there was no end to her malady. In addition, her temper worsened day by day. At this the Holy Mother remarked, as early as the middle of May 1913, 'I have no attachment to this Radhi. Coming in constant touch with diseases my mind has developed a dislike, but I keep it there by force, and say, "Master, let my mind be a little attached to Radhi, otherwise who will take care of her?" I never have seen such morbidity. She must have died of some disease in a previous birth before she could undertake any expiatory rites!' Although the Mother tried to keep her mind in this world, the mind refused to be pinned down. As an ostensible reason for this the devotees came to know, only of Radhu's diseased mind and body. The Mother had given her a good training, but Radhu's mental make-up was not high enough to be benefited thereby. The Mother's affection did not soften her, but made her all the more petulant and impudent. And her mother's insanity, too, penetrated somewhat into her character, thereby making her conduct towards the Mother repugnant to others. At last she came to disrespect, abuse, and beat the Holy Mother. Staggered at this development in her behaviour, the Holy Mother once said, 'Radhi, though you have been fed with the milk of a lioness, you continue to be the vixen that you are. What

pains have I not taken to make you a worthy person, but you have imbibed nothing of my goodness; you have taken wholly after your mother.' Radhu became enraged at this and drew the veil over her face. Amused at this the Mother remarked, 'You can't do without me, and yet you draw the veil at the sight of my face!'

The matter did not stop here. Once the Mother was going by bullock-cart from Vishnupur to Jayrambati. When the cart was approaching Kotulpur, Radhu, who was also in it, went on pushing the Mother with her feet and saying, 'Off with you, get away; get you down from this cart.' The Mother moved away from her to the farthest limit as she kept on saying, 'If I go, then who will do all these penances for you?' Another day, as Radhu kicked her, she took the dust of her feet and placed it on Radhu's head saying, 'What have you done Radhi, what have you done?'

Radhu's oppression of the Mother increased apace, and the Holy Mother by degrees, withdrew her thoughts from her. Now who can say which of these was the earlier? It rather strikes us that by divine dispensation the basic fact of disentanglement antecedent to final dissociation from life was taking shape simultaneously at both ends. At the time of leaving for Calcutta at the beginning of May 1918, the Mother wanted to see Radhu and had her brought from her father-in-law's house. As soon as she got down from the palanquin, the Mother greeted her warmly saying, 'Come, my daughter, Radhu', and pressed her to her bosom. But she was now aware that Radhu's individuality was fully developed; she had wilfully gone to her husband at Tajpur leaving behind the Holy Mother in her sick-bed at Koalpara, and later when the Mother had inquired if she would go to Calcutta, she had declined. The Mother took due account of Radhu's wishes and arranged for sending her back to her husband. At the time of parting Radhu wept bitterly and saluted the Mother by falling down at her feet; but the Mother remained totally

unmoved, though she blessed her cheerfully, and bade farewell to her quietly as she would have done to anyone else. A by-stander, not knowing them personally, could not believe that they were really Radhu and the Mother!

We now come to the beginning of April 1920. Radhu was then at Calcutta with the Mother, and her son was also there. Regretfully the Mother said, 'I have lost all for Radhu, my health, my spiritual exercises, money, indeed everything. And she is almost on the point of killing her son. He has somehow been saved on being handed over to Sarala after his coming here. And Kanjilal is treating him. As for Kanjilal he has declared already, "I shan't be able to treat the boy if he is in Radhu's keeping." I don't know what's there in the Master's mind; what's the meaning of giving her a son when she doesn't know so much as how to take care of her own person? And furthermore, she has developed a disease again. What's all this come to, my daughter? Whatever that may be, I am fed up with them. How outrageous was their conduct at home! Did they care for me at all?'

It is the Bengali New Year's day, in the middle of April 1920. The evening service at the 'Udbodhan' is over. It is not yet time to feed Radhu's son; some one has gone to call Sarala Devi for the purpose. But the child is crying; hence Radhu insists on feeding him forthwith. As the Mother forbids her, she flares up and curses the Mother, 'May you die, may your mouth be on (funeral) fire,' and so on. The Mother has been fighting for a long time with disease and truculence; and now she is a bed-ridden patient when her life is ebbing away and patience has reached its last limit. She can bear it no longer; and with the greatest pain mixed with the highest affection she says, 'Yes, you will know what straits you will be reduced to once I am gone.[1] Today, on this New Year's day, I wish it

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1. Nine months after the Mother's departure, Radhu's husband Manmatha married a second time and deprived of the love of her husband Radhu took her abode at Jayrambati. Manmatha's economic condition deteriorated at

so truly that you may die first and then I pass away in comfort.' Radhu could, however, hardly recognize the hidden touch of love, she could only see the indifference on the surface. With mortification the Mother said at last to a devotee, 'Fan me, my daughter, oppression from her burns me to the very bone.'

The Mother continued on this earth only for three months after this.

25

MISTRESS OF THE HOME

As the reader came to the end of the previous chapter, he must have heaved a deep sigh and said with the Bengali poet, 'You descended on earth for the good of people, and yet what tribulation had you to undergo!' We are constrained nevertheless to present in this chapter yet another doleful tale. And while on this task, we have to remember that we shall miss the import of the lives of those who descended for the betterment of this world in this age, if we study them merely against the background of the past. For in these lives there is not only to be seen the highest detachment, but also the most earnest desire to do good. In these lives the moral qualities like forbearance and kindness which are associated with saints were not practised in caves or secluded places but in the din and bustle of towns. Sri Ramakrishna, who was renunciation incarnate, never shunned his duty towards his mother, shed profuse tears at the death of his nephew Akshay, accepted his wife when she came to him and trained her up to carry on his message after him, and spent his whole life in the service of needy souls. Swami Vivekananda shed the last drop of his blood for the service of his own mother, motherland, and the God in men. The Mother's mind was never attached to the world in the ordinary sense of the term; and yet the actions and reactions of domestic contacts produced in her life such motherly love, patience, compassion, and endurance as were unparalleled; and because of this rare combination their bearing either on present-day or future society is not easy to assess, though even to us of the modern age there should be no doubt as to their far-reaching influence on ages to come. Hence it is useless to spend our time in discovering any meaning; it is much better to proceed with the life-history as we find it.

Revered Yogin-Ma had once this doubt in her mind: 'I have seen the Master as a man of extreme renunciation;

but I find the Mother so worldly-minded! Day and night she is occupied with her brothers, nephews, and nieces.' Then, one day, as she sat in *japa* on the bank of the Ganges, she had a vision in which the Master appeared to her and said, 'See, see, what is floating down the Ganges.' Yogin-Ma saw a newly born babe, red with blood and wound round in its navel string, being carried away by the current. The Master commented, 'Can the Ganges be polluted at any time? Think of her (the Mother) also in that way. Don't entertain these doubts. Know her and this (pointing to his own body) as identical.'

In studying the domestic life of the Mother, the first thing that strikes us is her non-attachment. She does her duties, to be sure; nay, it appears at times as if she was as much affected by the sorrows of the world as any other person; but the next moment an innate serenity that defies all vicissitudes emerges brilliantly like the moon freed from a passing cloud.

At the end of December 1918, the Mother sat on the porch near the main entrance of her house, while the monks sat on the verandah of the parlour. In front moved the loads of paddy towards the farm-yard of uncles Varada and Kali. The fencing put up by the latter outside his threshing floor had encroached a little on the road, so that the paddy bags coming to uncle Varada's barn could not pass through easily. This gave rise to an altercation between the two brothers, and a scuffle was about to ensue when the Mother, no longer able to sit indifferently, rushed to the place and, to pacify them, sometimes said to the one, 'It's your fault', and sometimes dragged the other by the hand. She was much older than either of the brothers, who had, in fact, been brought up by her. Hence they could not ignore their sister altogether; her intervention stopped them from coming to blows. Nevertheless, she could not stop them from exchanging hot words. She, however, kept standing between them. Just then the monks came to her rescue, and the brothers walked away cursing

each other. The Mother was excited, no doubt; and in a flurry she returned and sat down on the verandah of her house. And then in the twinkling of an eye her anger and agitation were nowhere; on the contrary, the eternal peace behind all clashes of worldly interest on this stage of life's drama revealed itself before her eyes to evoke a hearty laugh; and she said, 'What a maya (magic) is this of the Mahamaya (Conjuror). There stretches the infinite earth, and these possessions, too, will be left behind. Can't man understand this simple fact?' And she burst into a fit of laughter that lasted pretty long.

At noon on the last day of the month of Paush (about January 15), the Mother made her sons sit for eating cakes on the verandah of uncle Prasanna, while she herself sat by them to see that they were properly served. Nearby the mad aunt and Nalini Devi kept busy arranging things to be sent as gifts on that happy day to the houses of the fathers-in-law of Radhu and Maku respectively. Now and then they came to the Mother to consult her and apprise her of the articles being sent. The gifts were being drawn from her store and at her cost. And yet she did not seem to evince any interest; but in an absent-minded way answered 'yes' or 'no' to their eager questions. This indifference told on the nerves of both the aunt and Nalini Devi. First they mumbled and then began complaining openly. The Mother, too, then said, 'See, I have so many sons; when they come, one can serve them with food on hands or on leaves as one wills; and they eat with joy. But should one of theirs come, what a number of cups and dishes one will have to bring out! And if you don't, there will be bitter complaints!' When the devotees finished eating, the Mother got up and gave betels to them, but she did not send any presents to her sons-in-law's houses, and from her mood it was evident that this decision was deliberate.

The astrologer of Vishnupur had prophesied that some successive issues of Maku would not meet each other. Some

seven or eight days before the birth of her second son, her first son Neda died at Jayrambati at five-thirty in the afternoon of April 20, 1919, after suffering from diphtheria for three days. The news was carried by Dr. Vaikuntha Maharaj to the Holy Mother at Koalpara. At this she was beside herself with grief and cried as bitterly as any ordinary woman would. Not much later the time for offering food to the Master approached, and yet the Mother remained disconsolate. As a matter of duty, therefore, a devotee reminded her of the Master's worship. At once she was a changed person, as though nothing had happened. She offered the food duly. She did not cry for the whole night, though she talked about Neda and that with the greatest sorrow.

To feed and provide amply for the near and dear ones is a normal obligation of every householder; and society makes allowances for it though to cynics and pessimists such behaviour may appear as nothing better than sublimated selfishness. A man established in the knowledge of Brahman is equally cognizant of the illogicality of the situation. But unlike the cynic, he does not utter a single word of condemnation; on the contrary, he sympathizes with the householder in his struggle for the removal of a felt want, and he is ever ready to help him in his effort so far as it lies in his power. Such instances can be found in abundance in the life of the Mother.

Radhu was then ill at Koalpara. Uncle Kali and Brahmachari Varada were returning from their visit to the *tantrika* of Sushnegede to whom they had gone for getting some occult cure for Radhu. On the way the uncle said, 'Narayana Iyengar of Bangalore, who is a disciple of my sister, came here the other day and promised to dig a well on our land in front of sister's house. But now he is quite silent about it. He is a well-to-do man. If he digs the well it will benefit many. And as for the price of the land, is it so much after all? He can easily spare the money if he has a mind to. To be able to provide for sister's

drinking water — it's no small stroke of good fortune!' In other words the uncle wanted to exploit Sri Iyengar to get a few thousand rupees for a tiny plot of land. The uncle went on, 'Mind you, Varada, if sister saved all the money that she got as gifts, it would come to a good amount. But on the contrary she spends everything for her brothers and Radhi, she does not amass anything. Well, can you say to whom she gives most?' As Varada kept silent, the uncle changed his tone and said, 'Mind you, Varada, sister is honoured by people just because she has no passion for money. If she showed any interest in money such as ordinary people show, she would not command so much respect at all. It's just because of this that she is not human but divine — do you understand, Varada? Ah! You are all blessed! You have given up hearth and home at this early age and are running errands for sister day and night.' In the evening the Mother got a full report of the conversation from Varada and said smilingly, 'Kali is mad after money. "Food is a problem that makes fool of a wise man." He seems to consider his sister a money-yielding tree. But he has a little love and regard for me; in stress and strain it is Kali who stands by his sister. As for the others, the more you give, the merrier they are.'

Then came the day for the ceremony when Radhu's son would eat rice for the first time, and the Mother said to Varada, 'I have not got much in cash this time. To ask Kali to do the marketing means great expense. You purchase the more costly things after proper inquiry from Anur and Kotulpur. Later I shall get some of the smaller items purchased through Kali; otherwise he will fly into a rage.' The Mother then lived with her dependents and women devotees in a separate house.

Uncle Kali was a man of grave countenance and as such struck all with awe. Sisters Nalini, Maku, and Radhu and Radhu's mother were all afraid of him. If the mad aunt became too turbulent, one had simply to say 'Call in Kali for a while,' and she would immediately take shelter

in her room. The Mother knew her brother too well to enrage him. Therefore, on the present occasion, uncle Kali had the sole responsibility for going to the market for purchases for the birthday celebration of the Mother. For some days earlier he went on inquiring about all kinds of odd things about the Mother's household. One day he said, 'Sister, from the number to which the inmates here in your house have swelled, methinks, you can no longer manage with a woman cook; there's need for a male cook. And your birthday is approaching, the gathering will be big, and marketing will have to be done on a good scale. Varada is young and can't manage it all.' The Mother replied, 'Look here Kali, I live in this house with a bevy of girls, how can I keep a male cook among them here? As for these boys living with me, you may consider them rather as my daughters than sons. As regards the devotees, they will be there to be sure, and so the purchasing has to be done carefully.' In the evening the Mother said, 'Look here, the Kotulpur purchases will have to be done through Kali this time. He has been running after that job for some days. If I don't give him a loose rein now and then, he may fly into a rage and create a situation.'

It should be remarked in passing that at this time the Mother had to depend for some of her cooking on non-brahmins. The two boys attending on her were not brahmins. Nonetheless, as the old brahmin woman engaged in the kitchen was not strong enough for the whole work at night, the two boys had to do much of it except for boiling rice etc., which they were not permitted to assist in. The Mother was afraid lest the villagers should find a loophole here and in collusion with the people elsewhere create trouble for her. She had to be cautious in dealing with them, though as a matter of fact uncle Kali and Radhu's husband Manmatha had often their night meal at this house. At last uncle Varada raised the question openly and gave the quietus to it by saying, 'As to that, sister, these Brahmacharis are your disciples — they are pure and

holy. Even rice would be holy if cooked by them. One has a repulsion in eating from any shop in Calcutta; it does not give one any satisfaction.' Uncles Varada and Prasanna were somewhat liberal in these matters, moreover, they were not cliquy; hence the Mother had not much to fear from them. About uncle Kali she had to be circumspect; and the hints he dropped about the kitchen made her wary.

Anyway, uncle Kali made all the purchases for the birthday celebration, the entire management of which rested with him. As a result he looked happy, and the Mother was free from anxiety. But in the afternoon she was sitting sadly on the verandah. They all had finished taking their food and were taking rest; but the Mother had no respite even then. On inquiry, Brahmachari Gopesh (Swami Saradeshananda) got the answer from her; 'My son, this wretch Kali is a constant source of trouble; he worries me without rime and reason. See, for instance, all have eaten, but I am waiting here with his food. He is delaying on one excuse or another; and I, too, can't take rest.' Uncle Kali wanted an absolutely free hand in the day's affair; but somewhere he must have been baffled, and he was now about to teach his sister a lesson. Gopesh understood the situation and hurried to uncle, whom he found busy heaping up hay on his farm-yard. Finding his face flushed and eyes red with anger, Gopesh dare not utter a word, but instead tried to help in the work. In a little while uncle's anger was cooled, and he said, 'Dear boy, why have you come here to take this trouble?' Gopesh got the opportunity he was seeking, and he explained, 'Mother is waiting for you with your food.' 'I never imagined', pleaded uncle, 'that sister was waiting with the food. Let's go.' The Mother was very glad to get him, and sat by him to serve and feed him calmly as though nothing had happened.

Another remarkable incident of the day may be recorded here. When all the monks were busy with the day's

work and merriment — worshipping, cooking, or singing — Gopesh found the Mother busy in her kitchen, arranging for some light diet for uncle Varada's wife who was then expecting a child and was in bad health, but had no other woman in the house to look after her. And, therefore, the Mother had to take care of her, though she lived in a separate house at some distance. The Mother was today the centre of the day's festivity; yet oblivious of the honour, shown to her by others, she thought it her first duty to look after the comfort of her ailing sister-in-law. Accordingly, she quietly dressed the articles for the food, washed them in the pond, cooked them and carried to the patient's house, without any fluster or any sign of dislike in her face.

A few weeks later, and a little while before the birthday of the Master, uncle Kali said, 'Sister, as you are here this time, we shall have to celebrate Paramahamsa Mahashaya's (Master's) birthday on a befitting scale. Since you are here many relatives and other people will come to meet you.' The Mother was to start for Calcutta soon after the birthday; and uncle, therefore, talked of many visitors coming to bid her farewell. The Mother replied, 'Brother, where have I the kind of devotion that you have, and where's that capacity to celebrate the Master's birthday on a grand scale after my heart? Manage it somehow with potatoes, pumpkins, and such things as are available in this village. You can well see the state of my health; I am getting weaker day by day.' That was enough, uncle girded up his loins, and on the celebration day he was full of energy and enthusiasm, feeding people to his heart's content till dusk.

Not long after the quarrel between the two brothers we referred to in the beginning of the chapter, uncle Kali strengthened the fence round his farm-yard, made it tidy with a coating of cow-dung, and sat happily on the porch near his sister. In front of the Mother's house were being carried some bags of paddy to uncle Prasanna's barn. When they were a little way off, uncle Kali said in a low

voice, 'For how long have not those two stones (in front) been lying there! They have not been fixed on sister's birth-place. How joyous it will be if with Sarat Maharaj's (Swami Saradananda's) consent that plot of land is purchased in sister's name and a temple is put on it during our lifetime!' Those stones had been brought some time ago by the devotees of Ranchi for marking the birth-place of the Mother; but they had not been placed in position as the uncle could not be made to agree. Turning to the Mother, uncle Kali went on, 'As for my share, sister, I, can transfer it now and here, and the rest you take care of. Sarat Maharaj will pay me as he thinks best. It's my heart's desire that something is done about it right away.' We have to explain here that the portion of the plot of land that belonged to uncle Kali could not be utilized by him in any way, while the two other brothers put their land to use jointly. The Mother listened to him without much comment. In the evening she said to Brahmachari Varada, 'Listen Varada, in your today's letter to Sarat you write everything that Kali says now. When good sense has dawned on Kali, it strikes me, there should be no more delay. Prasanna is in Calcutta; Varada too will not refuse. It was Kali who raised objections at every step. As he mentions the matter of his own accord, it can be taken for granted that it will now be done. Didn't you see, how hard Narayana Iyengar begged to be allowed to dig a well (there) and yet he would not agree on any condition?' In those days Brahmachari Varada, under Saradananda's instruction, wrote daily to the latter informing him of the Mother's condition. Now he appraised the Swami of the new development. Next day the Mother told uncle, 'Varada wrote to Sarat reporting everything you told me yesterday.' 'But, sister', uncle corrected her then and there, 'I shall have to be paid something over and above the price that may be agreed upon. My family is large, and my income is small.' 'As for that,' intereceded the Mother, 'won't they also demand more if they get any

inkling of it?' Needless to say that as a matter of fact all the uncles demanded and received something in addition to their individual share of the money. Swami Saradananda, who did not want to let the opportunity slip, finalized the deal and had the document registered without caring for the cost. Sri Narayana Iyengar had proposed to sink a well in a corner of this land. This was begun in summer after the Mother left for Calcutta.

Sometime at the end of September 1918, uncle Prasanna had to leave for Calcutta in connection with his priestly duties there, and to the Mother he said, 'Sister, you have come here now and I have to go to Calcutta. The family is here left behind; do look after them a little. What more can I add? Kali will have the best of it now. He is having a happy time of it, living on his own farm in the midst of his family at home, and you too are here; whereas I have to wander about even in this old age.' As some of these words reached uncle Kali's ears he turned up and began criticizing his brother saying, 'He is whining before sister for extorting money.' Uncle Prasanna, retorted, 'Look here, Kali, whether you have any respect for me or not, know this for certain, that I come just after sister, and you after me. Where's your devotion for sister? you know far less than I do of sister; you care only for her money.' The Mother laughed as she heard it all, and she remarked, 'My brothers are jewels indeed! It's because they had in their previous lives made penances to the extent of beheading themselves that I have been staying in their family.' The Mother did not, of course, depend on them at that time. She had her own house and establishment, and it was the brothers who looked to her for help.

Uncle Prasanna lived mostly in Calcutta; and his income from priesthood was not negligible. Yet he was miserly and calculating perhaps as a result of the poverty of his boyhood days. When his daughter Kamala was two years old, the Mother was at Jayrambati; he himself was

in Calcutta. The girl has fever with some complications. There was need for better treatment, but uncle Prasanna could neither come nor send money. He might have thought that since his sister was there, she would take proper care of the girl. But the Mother could not tolerate this undue dependence, and when she got the news, she said in disgust, 'He will have children every year, and yet why forsooth should he be spending money if any falls sick?' And she became so grave that nobody dared raise the topic again. Fortunately, Kamala recovered through the medicines she had been taking.

The Mother had then dealings with her relatives on three levels— the first the brothers, the second the sisters-in-law and the nieces, and the third the nephews and the sons of her nieces. The difference of age among them was great. The brothers had personal incomes, and yet expected their sister's assistance. Three of her nieces Nalini, Maku, and Radhu and Rahu's mother Surabala had become members of her family for various reasons. And on the third level were the little guideless children. The Mother's dealings on all these levels were adjusted according to the age of her relatives. We have studied her relationship with her brothers. Now we shall learn something of her love and affection towards the other two groups. We shall come to see that though she fulfilled her self-chosen duty towards the grown up people without flinching even under provocation, her mother's heart had its softest, warmest, and most charming expression for these unsophisticated little children.

Uncle Prasanna married Suvasini Devi a year after the death of his first wife Rampriya. Suvasini was then a mere girl and very young as compared with her sisters-in-law. Uncle Kali's wife Subodhabala Devi, Varadaprasad's wife Indumati Devi, and Abhaycharan's wife Surabala Devi, too, were much younger than the Mother. We are acquainted with Surabala well enough, though more of her remains yet to be told. We need not refer to her daughter

Radhu in this chapter. We have come across Nalini and Maku, both daughters of Rampriya Devi, but we have not known them thoroughly enough. About Kamala and Vimala, daughters of Suvasini Devi, we have not much to say. But we shall have to add some words about Subodhbala's son Bhudev, Indumati's son Kshudiram, Maku's son Neda, and Radhu's son Banu. Nalini and Maku were married before Radhu. Nalini Devi could not live with her husband owing to his poverty and the bad treatment she received in the family; and so she lived with the Holy Mother from the time of her mother's death. Maku, though married in a landholders' family at Tajpur, lived with the Holy Mother for various reasons—she seldom went to her father-in-law's house; and her husband Pramatha was often found in the Mother's entourage, as also was Radhu's husband Manmatha.

The Mother had a natural softness for Nalini Devi, deprived as she was of the love of her husband's house; and, therefore, she kept this niece with herself, putting up with all her shortcomings. One night, when all were asleep, Nalini's husband Pramatha arrived from his home at Goghat with a bullock-cart to take his wife home. But she was so afraid of going there that she bolted her door and threatened to commit suicide. The Mother entreated her to come out, but to no effect; and then only when the Mother assured her that she would not be sent, did she come out of her room. The Mother had been all along sitting at Nalini's door with a lighted lantern by her side. When Nalini came out, it was dawn. So the Mother put off the light and repeated the holy names, as was her wont in the morning; 'Ganga, Gita, Gayatri; Bhagavata, Devotee, Deity; Master, Master.' Later she said in course of a talk, 'She (Nalini) has got a trace of her aunt's quality, my boy, and that's why she doesn't want to go.'

Nalini suffered from a craze for purity, which was something like a mania and irritated many. She used to say, 'If aunt (Mother) happens to tread on leaves on which

people had eaten their food, she simply washes her feet and walks into the room; she doesn't even wash her clothes. If on any day she says, "Nalini, give me a little Ganges water", I shall think that she has touched faeces.' Such was her suspicious mind. One winter evening she told the Mother with tears in her eyes that she had touched something impure. Now, she could not bathe in the cold night; and she could neither enter her room nor eat anything without bathing; and consequently she would have to stand out in the cold with bare body for the whole night. 'Why did such a thing happen?' she complained, and she burst into tears. The Mother consoled her, argued with her, but to no avail. 'There's none in this world', wailed Nalini, 'whom I can call my own; my father has married a second time, and he does not so much as look at me; in my husband's house, too, there are enemies', and so on. When the meal-time came she was whining in the same strain. In disgust the inmates planned to teach her a lesson that night — let her stay out the whole night. All went to bed, but before doing so they requested the Mother not to be soft. Yet, at midnight there was the sound of opening of the Mother's door. She came out and called tenderly, 'Nalini, dear daughter Nalini, get up my dear, go to your room. Why do you suffer in the cold outside?' But Nalini made no response. The Mother went on in a mood of soliloquy, 'Ah! Nalini is a child, a little lacking in wisdom, she can't understand and so she flies into a temper and suffers, and others become disgusted with her.' At last the Mother won; Nalini Devi went to her own room to sleep.

Nalini Devi's mind was full of the prejudices common to villagers. At one time some Domes (untouchables) brought some straw loops used as seats for round-bottomed vessels. The Mother said, 'Keep them there.' With great care they deposited the things at the place indicated. Yet Nalini shrieked out, 'There they have touched everything; throw these away.' And she went on reviling them

saying, 'Though you are Domes, how dare you keep things in such a fashion?' The Domes feared they had committed a grievous sin. But the Mother consoled them saying, 'You need not fear, nothing will happen to you.' And she gave them some fried-rice to eat.

There was no love lost between the mad aunt and Nalini; they were always at daggers drawn. Still they belonged to the same family; and the Mother had assumed the task of making them live together. She used to say, 'Whatever you may do, you have, as a matter of fact, to give everybody due attention and consult his opinion. You have to grant a little freedom and watch from a distance so that nothing may go very wrong. Thus, for instance, while I am sending these presents to Radhu's house (at Tajpur) I take counsel from Nalini also. The relation between her and my youngest sister-in-law is that of the snake and the mongoose — the one does not see anything good in the other; and the other does not so much as tread on her shadow. But when I make Nalini my guide and say, "See, Nalini, what things you like; select from these and tell me", then she says with regard to the list I make, 'How can these things suffice, aunt? Howsoever they may deal with you — and as for Radhi, she is as good as mad, having no sense at all — you have surely some dignity; why should you be so illiberal? You do just as it befits you." She speaks thus and makes the list longer. I, too, laugh inwardly. If I should send the present there without letting her know the two will at once begin to fight a battle of Kurukshetra over that matter. Mind you, one has to give some freedom to each and lower oneself a little. When dealing with these conceited persons, I have to study their moods and move accordingly; and yet they fall out now and then — as though it's their nature! How can I help that? I think to myself, "It's His world, He is taking care of it." '

The Mother assumed responsibility for Maku also; for her sake she had to keep in good humour the people at her

husband's house; and she used to say, 'If they are not very properly taken care of, they get offended at the slightest thing.' Maku was only slightly older than Radhu. When the Mother lived with Radhu at Koalpara in 1919, Nalini, in her envy, thought that the Mother was spending money unnecessarily on Radhu, while she was neglecting Maku who was in a very advanced state of pregnancy. Nalini at first said, 'Aunt' why are you so worried? Nothing is the matter with Radhu.' Then she wrangled with the mad aunt in season and out of season. And she advised Maku that it would be much better for her to go away to Jayrambati than to court neglect at Koalpara. Not only that, she had a palanquin brought and she left for Jayrambati with Maku and her son, without so much as consulting the Mother about this move. The Mother was then taking rest after her midday meal; from her bed she heard Nalini shouting to her younger sister, 'Maku, so you keep standing still! Come away quick.' Mortified by this unseemly conduct, the Mother said to Brahmachari Varada, 'She (Maku) did not so much as bring her son (Neda) to salute me when departing. It shall be as they have in store; what else can I do, my dear? But, for you there's this additional task of shuttling between the two places; unless you go every day to inquire about them, the anger will be heightened all the more.'

The Mother wanted and got news every day. When Neda fell ill, she arranged for his treatment. But the boy died after an illness of three days. These facts have already been stated. The Mother was getting ready to go to Jayrambati; but she had not had sufficient time to do so. She cried bitterly at the boy's death, so dear was he to her. That night she could not relish food; but when she knew that others could not take anything unless she did so, she drank a little milk and ate a few *luchis*. Her sorrow was in evidence the next day also; nay, even long after this, her eyes became wet and her voice choked as she talked of this boy. After his death she said, 'The boy must have been

some spiritual aspirant who died in an earlier life before attainment of salvation, or he might have been some holy man. He had a little (of worldliness) left; that much is over — this is his last birth. One cannot find so many good tendencies in a boy of his age. From somewhere he brought *gulancha* flowers every day to worship my feet. He called Sarat (Swami Saradananda) "red uncle". He could not read or write, being barely two and a half or three years of age. Yet in imitation of Sarat, he sat with a broken wooden box in front and every day wrote (on it) letters to Sarat; and he said by word of mouth whatever news of this place he was sending.' When on the evening of the day following Neda's death, Manindra Babu and Prabhakar Babu of Arambagh came to take leave of the Mother, she said with tearful eyes, 'He (Neda) asked, "Who made the flowers red?" I replied, "The Master has done so." "Why?" "Because he will put them on." Noticing her eyes wet even eight or ten days after the boy's death, one devotee asked, 'I think, you too now realize the sorrow that worldly people have when they lose their children?' the Mother replied, 'Does it require to be told? I can't free myself from the grief that I suffer because of having nurtured Maku's son.'

We turn to a much earlier incident. Neda was then a child of one year. In the morning the Mother was arranging some fruits and other articles to be offered to the Master, when Neda crawled forward to snatch away one of the peeled plantains. The Mother said tenderly, 'Tarry a little, my child, you will get it after it has been offered to the Master.' As the boy did not stop, the Mother pushed him back a little with her hand; but he still pushed forward in the direction of the fruit. The Mother's attendant now volunteered to carry him away. But she prevented him, put a plantain in Neda's mouth, and said, 'Eat, my Gopala, eat.' There was then a divine softness in her voice and a transcendental light in her eyes and face.[1]

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1. It is sacriligious to make a present of things meant for God before the worship. The Mother never did so with regard to the articles brought for the

The Mother recollected that Neda called her Sita. She had then lost her teeth, and Neda sat on the steps of a house, dangling his legs and saying 'Take two of my teeth.'

Radhu's son was born in the jungle (*vana*) of Koalpara. Therefore the Mother named him Vanabihari or in short Banu. In the morning, while waking up Banu, she sang just as mother Kausalya would have done when rousing her son Ramachandra:

> It's morning; get up my child, thou that art merciful to gods, men, and saints.
> Do thou bathe and offer as gifts, cattle, elephants, gold, and betel-nuts.

Indumati Devi's eldest son was Kshudiram or Kshudi in short; but as that was also the name of the Master's father; and according to custom, a daughter-in-law may not utter such a name out of respect for him, she pronounced the name as Fudi. As Kshudi loved fruits, the Mother sent these for him in parcels from Calcutta. While at home, she would mix together milk and rice after her meal and wait for the boy who knew of this and turned up in time. Finding him, the Mother would say tenderly, 'Come, my child, I have been calling you.' Kshudi's mother complained, 'It's not good to feed him with so many good things; being a poor man's son, where can he find such things for ever.' The Mother silenced her saying, 'You know nothing, my dear, "He that lives high is helped to do so by the Most High."' The Mother was to start for Calcutta and Kshudi clamoured to accompany her. To pacify the child, she presented him a gold ring she had from Shambhu Roy's wife, and a lump of candy, telling him to take a bite at it whenever he missed her. When Kshudi went to Calcutta with his mother, the

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Master. If any emergency arose, she would cook separately, or to pacify importunate children she would give them after a mental offering to the Master. Gopala here means the Lord in His form as a child.

Mother asked the boy affectionately what kind of anklets he would like to have. And Kshudi told her that he liked to have tinkling ones. The Mother said, 'That's good, my child. Gopala has tinkling anklets; you too shall have the same.' She got them made for him. One day she asked the boy, 'What curry had you, my child, with your rice?' He stretched both his hands to show the size of a huge cat fish (*magur*) which his mother had bought. The Mother again asked him, 'Did she give it to you?' The boy complained, 'She gave me only one piece, aunt—she gave away to all others.' The Mother said with a smile, 'Let Indu come, I shall straighten it out with her.' As soon as Indumati Devi turned up in the afternoon, the Mother said, 'Can you imagine? You bought such a big *magur* fish and cooked it; but you gave only one piece to Fudi, and nothing more!' Indumati explained that they had not purchased any fish whatsoever. The Mother laughed and said, 'Hello, dear; my brother Umesh used to talk like that. And Fudi does it so today.' Noticing the devotees worshipping the lotus feet of the Mother, Kshudi placed one tiny hand on her feet, and went on offering handfuls of flowers with the other. The Mother drew him to her lap and said, 'My child, you are all born free. There's no need of flowers any more.'

Indumati Devi fell seriously ill after the birth of her second son Vijay. The Mother called in doctors from various places, and she herself worked so strenuously that she fell ill. After recovery she said to Indumati, 'When a son is born to you, I suffer more than you do, under the apprehension that if anything happens to you, then it's I that shall have to take care (of the child). I can't certainly neglect it.' And she pronounced a queer benediction: 'I bless you so that you may not have any more male issue.' As Indumati Devi began to suffer from the time of Vijay's birth, the Mother named him Dukhiram (sorrowful Rama). But Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma protested, 'His lot will be cast in accordance with the name you give. Even as it is,

how he is suffering!' Then she changed the name to Vijay.

On the eve of the Jagad-dhatri worship, Vimala, younger daughter of Suvasini Devi had fever with swelling of feet which rendered her unconscious. Dr. Vaikuntha Maharaj after administering medicine told the Mother, 'I gave a dose of medicine just because you asked me to do so. It flowed out, for she has no pulse.' The Mother went to that house on hearing this, and Suvasini grasped her feet, wailed piteously, and taking the dust of those blessed feet mixed it with water to put into Vimala's lips. The Mother passed her hand over the girl's body and then coming to the image of the goddess prayed with folded hands, 'Mother, there will be Your worship tomorrow. Is it Thy will that my eldest sister-in-law shall be mourning then?' Vimala recovered consciousness the same night.

At the time of marriage, Bhudev was thirteen years old; and his wife a little girl. Noticing Subodhbala Devi, mother-in-law of the girl, chiding her, the Mother said jokingly, 'I say, my younger sister-in-law, be quiet, be quiet! "Has the new girl just dropped from nowhere? How much of tomtoming had there been at her marriage how many drums beaten and pipes blown!"' Then with a solemn voice she added 'Why do you scold her? How dear is this daughter-in-law of ours!'

The Mother had reason to laugh at the severe attitude of Subodhbala Devi. When these sisters-in-law came to their husbands, they were inexperienced little girls, and the Mother, as the *de facto* guardian of the whole family, took in hand their training and brought them up lovingly and patiently in spite of their shortcomings. With them she maintained for ever this relation of affection.

Indumati Devi and sister Nalini were then young and did not know how to cook; hence the Mother used to tell them, 'Come to me and learn to cook. Shall I be cooking at your house for ever?' In later years, when Indumati became a perfect mistress of her household, the Mother

had her own separate establishment. She then used to ask Indumati to cook some simple curries which the Master liked most, with figs and greens like *Gima* (*mollugo cerviana*), *Amrul* (*oxalis corniculala*), etc., and said encouragingly, 'You cook the fig curry very nicely.' Once, when Indumati had some digestive trouble, the Mother advised her, 'Look here! Do some *japa* and meditation and then the physical ailment will disappear.' And on another occasion she warned her, 'Look here! You are all very inexperienced; you should do your duties carefully. My Master is very vigilant; if you are careless, you will incur sin.'

On the occasion of the worship of the goddess Manasa, the mother of Balaram Banerji of Jayrambati fed the devotees sumptuously; and hence on returning home no one felt inclined to cook. Nalini, the cook, said, 'We all can manage with a tin of fried-rice, instead of setting out to cook now.' Nevertheless, Suvasini Devi cooked four pounds of rice; and all had their full meals. Next day, the Mother, when engaged in dressing vegetables with others, remarked, 'Nalini forbade cooking; but sister-in-law did it; that saved a tin of fried-rice. Otherwise we would have to call in Mrigendra's mother again today, though she had made the fried-rice for us yesterday. "Blessed is she that understands, no matter whether she's senior or junior."' Once when the Mother was staying at Kamarpukur for a fortnight, Suvasini Devi happened to send some lotuses and some sweets for her, on receiving which the Mother remarked, 'No one sends me any present in this family—only this one does.' Suvasini was an initiated disciple of the Mother. One day, when old papers were being cleared, a bundle of currency notes, worth fifty or sixty rupees, was thrown out by mistake. When Suvasini found it and brought it to the Mother, the latter said kissing her by touching her chin, 'Gaur-dasi (Gauri-Ma) made this one mine, for Gaur-dasi is very clever.' The Mother at first was against initiating a sister-in-law, saying 'I shan't

impart any *mantra* to persons within the family.' But Gauri-Ma argued, 'How is that so, Mother? Let there be at least one whom you can call your own.' So Suvasini got her initiation. Subsequently, Maku Bhudev and his wife, and Radhu and her husband had initiation.

The Mother was full of praise for anything presented to her by her dear ones. Suvasini Devi once prepared a certain kind of tooth-powder which she knew the Mother liked. She then sent it through her husband to the Mother in Calcutta. The Mother remembered this till her return to Jayrambati when she said to Suvasini, 'The tooth-powder that you sent was highly appreciated by all.' Suvasini regretted before the Mother that though she had taken the *mantra*, she was not having adequate practice. At this the Mother said, 'This work that you are doing is itself a practice—what other practice should there be? Pray to the Master that he may grant you devotion.'

The world has its happiness and sorrow, its ups and downs. In spite of them all the Mother tried to make life joyous for all and to live with all in an atmosphere of cordiality. But there were opposing forces which set at nought all her good intentions. The selfishness of the brothers, the mutual jealousy of the nieces, Nalini's mania for purity, the perversity of Radhu, and the insanity of Radhu's mother—all these combined to produce an intolerable atmosphere in which it was possible for Mother to carry on her self-chosen duty without demur only because of her matchless, patient and forgiving nature. The Mother's domestic life is made up of all this. We have almost come to the end of this sad chapter but for a few words to be added about the mad aunt.

In the beginning of February 1907, Surabala Devi went to her father's house with her box of ornaments. The greedy father annexed the box from his daughter, and this made the aunt all the more unbalanced. One day she went to the shrine of the goddess Simhavahini and bemoaned in this strain; 'Mother, give me my ornaments,

give me my ornaments.' The Mother was then sitting in her own house and talking with another devotee who heard nothing of the cry of Surabala. Indeed, there was no reason why he should from that distance. But the Mother heard her cries and said, 'I am going, I am going. My boy, she has none other than myself. The mad one is crying before Simhavahini for her ornaments.' And she left for the temple. The mad aunt came away with her; but then she changed the burden of her complaint and charged the Mother saying, 'Sister-in-law, it is you who are holding back my ornaments, and it is you who are not returning them.' The Mother replied, 'If I had them I should throw away the trash.' And turning to the devotee she said, 'Girish used to say that she is the mad companion that has come with me.' Some days after this, the Mother sent a devotee with an old servant of the house either to bring Surabala's father or the ornaments. The brahmin came, but not with the ornaments. The Mother implored the old man by taking hold of his feet, 'Kindly save me from this difficulty.' But the covetous old man was obdurate. As a last resort the Mother communicated the whole matter to Calcutta, in response to which Master Mahashaya and Lalit Chatterji, nicknamed Kaiser, came in a few days. Lalit Babu was armed with a letter from a high police officer of Calcutta, with the help of which he got a few constables from Badanganj police station. With this posse of policemen following him, and himself sitting in a palanquin in a full European suit, as though he were a police officer, he proceeded to the old brahmin's house on the day succeeding the Sivaratri festival. But the move raised misgivings in the Mother's mind, lest Lalit Chatterji through his youthful indiscretion should dishonour the brahmin. And so she sent Master Mahashaya also after him. They returned with the brahmin and the ornaments before dusk, and the brahmin handed over the box. The incident ended there; but at 2 a.m. at night the news came to the outer apartment that the Mother was

passing a wholly sleepless night, and that her head was reeling. On being questioned about the cause of this discomfort, she explained, 'On the one hand they all went out in quest of the ornaments, and on the other I kept on thinking the whole day, lest the brahmin should be insulted in any way. This made me nervous; and hence this condition.'

In February 1913, when the Mother was at the 'Udbodhan' in Calcutta, Surabala concluded that the Mother kept Radhu under her control through the power of drugs, and yet she was spending all she had without making provision for the girl. Surabala's mind was, therefore, very much exercised about Radhu's future; and she abused the Mother. One night the Mother became disgusted at such foul language and said sternly, 'Don't you consider me an ordinary mortal. I don't take any offence, though you revile me so much, casting slur on my father and mother, just because I think that these are mere words. Do you think you can have any escape if I am really offended? It's all to your advantage so long as I live. Your daughter will be yours only. I shall be there so long only as she is not properly brought up. Otherwise what attachment have I? I can rend all ties asunder this very moment. You won't so much as have an inkling of my disappearing some day like camphor.' The mad aunt now became a changed person, and explained, 'When did I abuse you, casting slur on your father? I never did such a thing, I made just a simple statement. The trouble is, when you give, you give away without reserve.'

During the Mother's last stay at Jayrambati, her health became very bad and her body weak and emaciated. She hardly had any domestic peace. There was trouble from Radhu who continued to crawl about for six months after child-birth. And over and above all these there was the mad, cross-grained Surabala who was rather quarrelsome. One day she imagined that her son-in-law Manmatha had been drowned. She explored every

corner for him, but could find him nowhere. At last she got into a tank and searched for him there also. Suddenly it flashed in her mind, 'All this is the work of sister-in-law.' She hurried to the Mother at once with wet cloth and cried saying, 'O dear sister-in-law, my son-in-law has been drowned in the Badujye tank. What's to be done now?' In great consternation the Mother called in everybody. One of them said on hearing the whole story, 'I saw Manmatha playing cards in the grocer's shop.' 'Run,' said the Mother , 'and bring him here.' Manmatha came immediately, and the mad aunt retired abusing the Mother nevertheless.

What followed is extremely sad to contemplate. Mother quite lost her patience. She was perhaps preparing for the final departure, and before her earthly play was over she wanted to take back with her the mad companion also.

On the evening of the above-mentioned incident the Mother was dressing vegetables for the night, when the cranky and cantankerous Surabala burst in upon her with the charge: 'It's you who have been administering opium to Radhu with a view to crippling her and keeping her under your thumb.' Whether the devotees believed it or not, the Mother was then really eager to free herself from all bonds, however self-chosen they might have been. And hence with the greatest unconcern she said, 'Why don't you take away your daughter? There she lies. Have I kept her concealed?' The mad aunt did not want facts or reason; she was on the war path. This apathetic and calm response of the Mother stirred her mettle. She started abusing violently and her pugnacity blazed up by stages, until at last she was grill red with anger. Then taking in hand a piece of fuel, she tried to strike the Mother on the head. Frightened by that terrible sight, the Mother shrieked out helplessly, 'Hello, who is there, the mad woman is killing me.' Brahmachari Varada ran in to find the log about to fall on the head. He snatched it

away in the twinkling of an eye, drove the crazy woman out of the main gate, and shaking with anger forbade her to enter those precincts again. When he returned to the Mother, he found her still in a ruffled mood in the midst of which these words shot out of her lips: 'Mad woman, what were you about to do? That hand of yours will fall off from your body.' And just as she had uttered these in a state of fury, she regained her own innate composure and biting her tongue as a sign of remorse for an unintentional lapse, she looked at the Master's picture with folded hands and said penitently, 'Master, what's this that I have done? What's the remedy now? Hitherto no curse against anybody had ever escaped my lips; and yet that, too, comes to pass at last! Why tarry longer then?' She was weeping then. That compassion and self-reproach kept Varada spell-bound and his own anger melted away.

The mad aunt was attacked with leprosy not long after the passing away of the Mother, as a result of which she lost her fingers. However, she had not to suffer much. She passed away not long after to repair to her own place at the lotus feet of the Holy Mother.

26

A GUIDING FORCE

The Mother visited Bodh Gaya at the end of March 1890. On that occasion the contrast between the wealth of the monastery there on the one hand, and on the other the absence of any permanent residence, the indescribable want of food and raiment, and the hard physical labour for running the monastery on the part of her world-renouncing sons, moved very much the Mother of the Order. She said subsequently, 'Ah! For this, how I shed tears and prayed to the Master! And only then, through his grace has come into existence today the Math (monastery). When the Master left his body, the boys gave up the world and gathered together round a (rented) shelter for some days. Then they scattered about independently and went on roaming about here and there. Then I felt intensely sad and prayed thus to the Master, " Master, you came, played and disported with these few and then went away; and should everything end with that? If so, where was the need for coming down in the midst of so much sorrow. I have seen in Banaras and Vrindaban many holy men who get their food by begging and shifting their 'residence' from the shadow of one tree to that of another. There's no dearth of holy men of that type. I shan't be able to bear the sight of my sons, who come out in your name, going about begging for food. My prayer is, that those who leave the world in your name may never be in need of bare subsistence. They will all live together holding to your ideas and ideals; and the people afflicted with the worries of the world will resort to them and be solaced by hearing about you. That's why you came. My heart is pained to see them wandering about." After that, Naren (Swami Vivekananda) began gradually building up all this.'

Every sentence here reveals her infinite motherly love and solicitude for the Order, her firm grasp of and convic-

tion about the uniqueness of the Master's message and its future possibilities and her earnestness for having a permanent habitation for her children. These hopes and desires were not mere idle fancies of her mind; as long as she was on this earth, she did her utmost to see the Order well established and ably managed. Love, according to her, was the life-force of the Order. As every member thereof looked up to her for her benign blessing, so also she wanted each of its units to be tied to others by the bond of affection, so that a solid brotherhood might emerge defying all disruptive tendencies. The head of the Koalpara Ashrama expected work from the Brahmacharis under him; but in return he showed neither active love for them, nor concern for their welfare; and there was no proper arrangement for their food and clothing. The result was that many left the Ashrama to live with the Mother or with Swami Saradananda. Still the head did not mend his ways; on the contrary he approached the Mother in a mood of wounded justice and said, 'Mother, formerly they were all very obedient; now they have their eyes opened, they are not always willing to continue under my control. Besides, if they go either to Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) or yourself, you keep them with love and care, and they get advantage of better food. If you don't keep them, but explain things to them and send them back to me, then they will be obedient to me.' Amazed at such a talk, the Holy Mother, love incarnate as she was, said, 'How is that so? What's all this you are talking about? Love is our forte. It's through love that the Master's family has taken shape. And I am a mother; how could you talk to me twittingly about the food and clothing of my sons?'

The head of the Ashrama did not take adequate care of even the health of the inmates, though they suffered from malaria. When the Mother came to know of this, she had nourshing food arranged for them. She also expressed her disapproval of the authoritarianism of the

head by saying, 'How so, my boy? If you go on exercising authority in this way with diplomacy at the back of your mind, how can the Ashrama go on? May be, the boys are all your pupils, yet even if one scolds one's own son, excess of it results in separation.'

The Mother had the greatest affection for the head, and he too was profoundly devoted to her; but that was no reason why she should wink at callousness. When the Mother was at the Koalpara Ashrama with Radhu, the head informed the Mother one day that the Brahmacharis did not want to stay there, and that they had left for other places, and so the Mother should make it impossible for them to find shelter anywhere else and thus compel them to stay at Koalpara to serve the Mother. This suggestion enraged her and she said, 'What would you have me say to them? Do you expect me to tell them that they shall not find quarters anywhere? They are my sons, and have come to the Master; the Master will look after them wherever they may be. And you would have me say that they shall be refused accommodation everywhere. I shall never say that.' All became awed at the Mother's flushed face and loud voice. The devoted head at once fell at her feet and begged for mercy.

Though the Mother corrected the head when the need arose, she also advised the inmates to be disciplined and forbearing. A few days earlier than the incident related above, she said to a Brahmachari, 'Look here, every one has to be accommodating. The Master used to say, "*sha, sha, sa*"[1]. Forbear everything . He is there to judge.' In spite of the numerous inconveniences of a corporate life, she advised the monks to live unitedly in the Ashramas and such other places and work there.

Swamis Vishuddhananda, Shantananda, and Girijananda left home through extreme dislike for the world and

1. In colloquial Bengali *Sa* (*saha*) means forbear; and in the Bengali alphabet there are three 's' sounds (sibilants), as shown above. Punning on these letters, the Master emphasizes thrice the need of forbearance.

walked from Calcutta to Jayrambati. They, and particularly Swami Vishuddhananda, wished with the Mother's blessing to become itinerant monks, spending the rest of their lives outside Ashramas in austerity at holy places. The Mother welcomed them affectionately, heard them attentively, and fed them with tender care. Next morning she said, 'Shave your heads today and have your clothes coloured with ochre; I shall sanction your Sannyasa (formal renunciation) tomorrow.' Next day (July 29, 1907) she handed over to each of them his ochre garment and prayed to the Master, 'Master, protect their (vow of) renunciation. Wherever they may be—on hills or mountains, in forests or wildernesses—grant them their little sustenance.' But she did not at all like the idea of their itineration: and hence on the eve of bidding farewell to them she said, 'There's no need for you to undergo such hardship. But since you have resolved to be wandering monks, I grant you this much as a last resort—you walk up to Banaras. There I am writing to Tarak (Swami Shivananda); he will accommodate you. Live with him to build up your life of monasticism. Also take your monastic names from him.' Accordingly, they started for Banaras. The Mother accompanied them to the border of the village and there bade adieu with tearful eyes. When they reached Banaras, Swami Shivananda did as he was directed.

We now come to an event in April 1911, when a monk was staying at the 'Udbodhan' after committing a serious offence. Revered Swami Brahmananda and other aged monks wanted him to leave the 'Udbodhan' and go to the Belur Math. But he was loth to comply. About him Swami Saradananda one day submitted to the Mother, 'Should Maharaj's (Swami Brahmananda's) words, our words be totally ignored? Let him go to the Math for at least a couple of days just for the sake of respecting Maharaj's order.' A few days later the Mother alluded to this talk and said that she herself had advised him to go to

the Math, but with no result. About him she said regretfully, 'To be sure, it concerns a superior's command! The truth is, he has no mind to work. Does the mind remain healthy if one doesn't? Is it possible to do *japa* and meditation all the twenty-four hours? One should have some other useful engagement. That will keep the mind well.' But though she tried in vain to change the monk's mind, she never showed any the less affection for him.

A year after this, a son of hers represented that according to some it was not befitting a monk's life to run hospitals, sell books, keep accounts, etc.; that the Master had done no such thing; that if anyone was in need of engagements one should have recourse to such practices as worship, *japa*, meditation, and singing the Lord's name, as all other works would deflect the mind from God. Having heard it all through, the Mother said finally, 'If you don't work, with what will you occupy yourself day and night? Is it possible to meditate and make *japa* all the twenty-four hours? They refer to the Master! He is an exception, and Mathur supplied him his dainty dishes. You get your food just because you have engaged yourself in some work here. Otherwise would you not be moving from door to door for a morsel of rice? Everything shall go on as the Master ordains. The Math will run as it is doing now. Those who can't put up with this will clear out.'

During her stay at Banaras in 1912, the Mother remarked while visiting a widow's home managed by the local Ramakrishna Mission, 'By serving these helpless old women one serves Narayana (God) Himself. Ah! What a fine piece of work these boys are doing!' And about this same institution she said on another occasion, 'All this is His wish, my daughter! He knows best how He is getting His plan executed and through what.'

About *japa* and meditation she said one day at Jayrambati, 'How many can carry on *japa* and meditation all the time? It's much better to work, keeping the mind fixed and without letting it wander about. The mind creates

trouble whenever it is let loose. It's because Naren realized this that he started selflesss work.'

The Mother had not a shadow of doubt that the Master would work out his new message through his Order. One day a certain head of a monastery regretted before the Mother that owing to the lack of practical public sympathy, the work was not progressing satisfactorily; for our countrymen knew only how to destroy and not how to build. To this the Mother replied with conviction, 'My son, the Master said, "When the southern breeze blows, all trees that have developed hard-wood get transformed into sandal." The southern breeze has blown; now all will be turned into sandal—except bamboos and bananas.'

Many problems of the Ashramas and their inmates either came to her notice or were placed before her by others, and in each case she gave advice and suggested remedies. To the charitable dispensary at Koalpara came many patients who had the means to purchase medicines elsewhere. Discovering this, the head of the centre approached the Mother with the request that she might sanction the discontinuance of such practice. But she stretched her vision beyond that of an ordinary mortal and said that any one who came to beg must be considered needy and as such should not be turned out. So the dispensary continued to be open to all.

Before this Ashrama was incorporated into the Ramakrishna Organization, the inmates of the institution had active sympathy for the Swadesi movement, which aimed at bringing the British government to its senses through boycott of foreign goods and patronage of home-made ones. The Mother noticed that their energy was being frittered away by mere talk, and so she said, 'Look here, don't you simply move about agitating and shouting "*Vande-mataram*" (Salutation to the mother country); have looms and weave cloth. I wish I had myself a spinning wheel. Do something constructive.' And we have mentioned elsewhere how with a view to basing the Ashrama

activities on sprituality, she installed there with her own hands the Master as the presiding Deity.

She was also eager to instil into the Brahmacharis of the Ashrama a thrist for knowledge. To those who served her she said one day, 'Mind you, many devotees will come from foreign lands: you master the English language.' For this work she first engaged Swami Dharmananda and then Krishnabhusan Babu of Dacca.

She praised work; but then she was not blind to its evil consequences. Some monks start monasteries with the best of motives, but the contact with the world and worldly people often exerts a baneful influence over their minds and diverts them from the path of God. So the Mother said to Swami Tanmayananda, 'Should one jump out of a frying pan to enter into the fire! Instead of calling on the Lord after leaving the world one merely occupies oneself with work. An Ashrama is a second household. People leave home for the Ashrama; but they become so much attached that they don't want to leave an Ashrama.'

Another point to be noted in the Mother's life was a charming combination of maternal tenderness with non-attachment. With heart and soul she wished for the good of all her children. Once, at Jayrambati, at the time of the worship of Durga, when all had departed after offering flowers at her sacred feet at the most sacred moment of the juncture of the eighth and ninth days of the moon, the Mother said to a Brahmachari, 'Bring more flowers, and offer them on behalf of Rakhal, Tarak, Sarat, Khoka (Subodhananda), Yogen (Yogin-Ma), and Golap (Golap-Ma). Offer flowers in the names of all my known and unknown children.' Accepting the worship, she sat silently for a long time with folded hands before the Master and then prayed, 'Let all prosper, here and hereafter.' On another occasion during her birthday at the 'Udbodhan' in 1918, when all went away after adoring her with flowers, she called Brahmachari Varada to herself, blessed him by laying her hand on his head, and then directed him, 'Offer

flowers in the names of all at Jayrambati and Koalpara; for this is a special day.' When this was done, she prayed to the Master for the weal of all.

Only those with personal experience of that affection will realize how deep and rare it was and through what diverse channels it flowed. Brahmachari Jnan (Swami Jnanananda) suffered at Jayrambati from itches which became so pervasive and painful that he could not eat with his hand; and so the Mother mixed the rice and curries for him and put them morsel by morsel into his mouth. Brahmachari Rashbihari, while busy in connection with the work of the new house of the Mother at Jayrambati, had to go on an errand to a distant village from which he could not return in time for his noon-meal. It was winter when days were short. Returning only a few hours before sunset, he was taken aback to learn that the Mother waited for his return and would not sit for her meal. He remonstrated, 'Mother, your health is bad, yet why have you kept fasting till this hour?' The Mother replied, 'My son, how can I eat so long as you have not done so?' Rashbihari sat down for his food without further delay; and the Mother and other women, who had been waiting for her, sat only after he had finished. How many mothers are so very considerate for their own children?

Swami Vrajeshwarananda worked heart and soul at the Belur Math and was loved by the older monks. Once it struck him, 'Instead of gratifying my self-importance in this way by getting the indulgence of the old monks, it is better to go outside to undertake austerity.' But he knew that he would not get the approval of the Math authorities; and, therefore, he went to Calcutta to obtain the Mother's sanction. He bowed down before her and opened out his mind. The Mother wanted to know where he would go and whether he had any money with him. Vrajeshwarananda said that he was penniless and that he would walk up to Banaras along the Grand Trunk Road. The Mother then said with the tenderest tone. 'This is Kartika (October–

November), (when) people say that all the four doors of Yama (Death) are open. I am a mother; how can I say, "My son, you go"? Moreover, you say, you have nothing with you; who will feed you, my boy, when you are hungry?' Vrajeshwarananda abandoned his plan.

As misfortune would have it, someone was leaving the Order. As he came to bid farewell, the Mother began to weep and so also did the devotee. A little later she wiped her tears with the edge of her cloth and asked the devotee to wash his face in the bathroom. Then she said, 'Don't forget me. I know you won't; still I say so.' 'What about you, Mother?' asked the devotee. 'Can a mother forget?' replied the Mother, and she added, 'Believe me I shall ever be with you. Don't be afraid.' When the devotee got down on the road, the Mother kept on looking at him from the window till he could be seen no more.

Once the head of the Koalpara Ashrama commented that the boys moved from one monastery to another simply for the sake of good food. Alluding to this the Mother said, 'Notice what a queer remark it is! Why should my sons, the Master's sons, lack food? They shall not. I myself prayed to the Master, "O Master, may your sons never suffer for want of food." And he insinuates that they run about because of their greed!'

Brahmachari Rashbihari reached Jayrambati in 1907 with an extreme repulsion for the world in his heart and with a single piece of cloth round his person. On the way, it did of course occur to him that he should return home to get more clothes; but lest some hindrance should crop up, he preferred to move on without any spare clothes in hand. The Mother received him cordially, gave him another cloth which she asked him to take away when leaving Jayrambati, and she offered to pay him his return fare, which, however, he refused as he had no need of it. At the time of departure the Mother said, 'Write to me after reaching there;' and added sorrowfully, 'I could not feed my son properly.'

And yet what a number of people were granted Sannyasa, and were thus helped to leave home, by this very soft-hearted mother! True it is that she did not permit taking Sannyasa indiscriminately; her advice about marriage and celibacy varied according to circumstances. Reading the future of the inquirer with her divine eyes, she said to the monks at times, 'What a sad lot is that of householders! You'll now heave a sigh of relief and sleep soundly.' At other times she said to wavering bachelors, 'I can't venture any opinion about that. If you are unhappy after wedlock you'll say, "Mother, you consented to my marriage."' Some devotee would say, 'Mother, I won't marry.' And to this the Mother might reply with a smile, 'How is that? All things in the world are arranged in pairs. Look here, for instance, there are two eyes, two ears, two hands, two feet—just so are husband and wife.' That devotee got wedded. Some one else would say, 'Mother I have no desire to marry; my parents want to make me do so per force.' The Mother would reply at once, 'See, see, what oppression!' Once a devotee said to her, 'Mother, I have tried so long to remain a bachelor; now I see, I shan't be able to continue.' The Mother said reassuringly, 'Why be afraid? There were quite a number of householder devotees of the Master. You need not be afraid, you can wed.'

It was not easy to understand the Mother's mind in such situations; curiosity was, therefore, rampant. The widow of Navasan one day expostulated, 'Mother, all your sons are equal; and yet to one who seeks your opinion regarding marriage, you give your consent for it; and him who wants to leave the world, you advise approvingly eulogizing renunciation. It should rather be your duty to lead all along the path that is best.' The Mother answered, 'Will a man whose thirst for enjoyment is great obey me even if I prohibit it? And should I not help him a little who through his immense good luck has seen through this play of maya and clings to Him as the only reality?

My daughter, is there any end to the woes of the world?'

Even if we take it for granted that one should assist a monk in the path of his renunciation, the question arises, 'Who can recognize such a passionless man, and after such recognition who can help him?' The Mother knew well enough that a layman cannot have the same outlook as a monk. We are not taking into consideration such persons as the widow of Navasan in whom affliction in life and devotion towards the Mother had generated a veneration for the ochre garb; we have here in mind people who have the clarity of vision and are willing to help souls that are free from attachment. How many are there of such a high calibre? When the Mother was at Jayrambati for the last time there came a young man who had obtained the M. A. degree. He said that he was in a dilemma. Understanding that he was desirous of the monastic life, Swami Shivananda of the Belur Math had encouraged him heartily; but considering the shock that his mother would get, Master Mahashaya had been advising delay.[1] The Mother listened without any commitment. Later she told Brahmachari Varada, 'He has his mother and brother at home, which is near Master's (Master Mahashaya's). Hearing that he wants to become a monk, Master is dilly-dallying and saying, "What harm is there if you don't take orders so hurriedly?" But at the Math, Tarak (Shivananda) is giving him much encouragement. After all, Master is a householder, and Tarak an unsophisticated holy man. Ah! To accept the Master's (Sri Ramakrishna's) ideal of renunciation is the result of great good fortune. Tarak has spoken rightly. How many can rise up if they once dive into the world? The boy has great strength of mind.' When the young man saluted her again the next day, she blessed him heartily and said, 'May your wish be

1. Though Master Mahashaya seemed to be a little reserved in this particular case, in actuality he inspired many to take to a life of renunciation.

fulfilled, my boy. What Tarak has said is absolutely true.'

Rammay was then quite young. He was reading for the B.A. degree. Everyone in the Mothers' household knew that he wanted to become a monk. One noon the Mother was cleaning her teeth with powder, while Rammay stood by her. Suddenly Nalini Devi said, 'Just see, dear aunt, how fine this boy is. He has passed two examinations, (Matriculation and Intermediate Arts), and is now reading for the third. With what sacrifice his parents brought him up and are now defraying his expenses for education! And here the good boy wants to become a holy man! He should be earning to feed them, but he has no such thought!' 'What can you understand?' interposed the Mother. 'They are not the crow's fledglings but the cuckoo's. As they grow, they recognize their true mother and fly away from the nursing mother to their true mother.' [1] Rammay became a monk subsequently under the name Swami Gaurishwarananda.

When the Mother was at Jayrambati for the last time, a young man named Manasa got the ochre robe from her; and much elated thereby, he sat in the drawing-room of uncle Kali to sing sweetly some songs on goddess Kali, songs which charmed Maku and Radhu who sat by him, as also the Holy Mother and some of the aunts who heard from a distance. One of the aunts remarked, 'Sister-in-law has turned that boy into a monk.' And Maku joined in saying, 'With what expectations the parents of this boy brought him up; and all these are now dashed to the ground! Marriage, too, is a virtuous act in this world. If aunt goes on making monks in this way, Mahamaya will become angry with her. If they want to take orders, let them do so by themselves; why should aunt be instrumental in this?' After she had finished, the Mother said, 'Maku, they are all divine children; they will live on this

1. Refers to the habit of cuckoos laying eggs in crows' nests. The crows hatch the eggs and feed the young cuckoos till they can fly.

earth as pure as flowers. What can be happier than that? Haven't you seen into the happiness of this world? I am getting my very bones scorched by the fiery ordeals of your family lives.'

Even though naturally inclined to a life of renunciation, the Mother was very careful about granting Sannyasa. Since Swami Keshavananda was the only son of his mother, she did not at first consent to his renouncing the world; but when she was assured that he had his mother's approval she gladly agreed. As the Swami suffered from asthma and was in bad health, his mother prayed to the Holy Mother before he embraced the monk's life that she might not have to see her son die before her. The Mother granted the boon, which was duly fulfilled.

In 1913, Brahmachari Devendra came to Jayrambati from Banaras and prayed for Sannyasa. The Mother inquired about the condition of his family and when she became satisfied that the family would not suffer by losing him, she permitted him to get the ochre robes from Koalpara and granted him Sannyasa on the next day.

Again, when during her last illness at the 'Udbodhan', she was informed of the death of the father of a young man living with her, she inquired of him about his family affairs and said subsequently, 'Can you understand why I asked you today so much about your family, and your mother? When I first got the news of your father's death from G. I asked him on whom else your mother could depend, whether she had sufficient provision for her maintenance, and whether she could do without you. Having been told that she can manage even if she loses you, I thought within myself, "Good! As the boy has a noble intention, there won't be any great hindrance to his continuing in the holy path."'

Once she had granted Sannyasa after thorough inquiry, she was not to be swerved from her decision by criticism, nay, not even by tears; for it was her conviction that one who renounced for God was really blessed. Soon after an

aspirant had left Jayrambati with ochre clothes granted by the Mother, his mother and wife came there weeping bitterly for securing a cancellation, and complaining that such indiscretion was going to ruin a family. But the Mother firmly told them, 'He has not done any wrong, he has chosen the right path; and I have been told that he has provided for your maintenance.' They were pacified by the Mother's affection and persuasion and left Jayrambati in a peaceful frame of mind.

Instances are not rare when she set her face against Sannyasa. Once a woman disciple of hers wrote that her husband had been repeatedly telling her, 'You go away with your children and live with your parents. I shall not live in the world any longer, but shall become a monk.' Every line of the woman's letter was full of piteous wail and helpless cry for succour. Hearing the letter read, the Mother said with some emotion, 'Just see the impropriety of the thing! He will be a monk, forsooth! Why did he marry? If you really want to give up, first make suitable arrangement for the subsistence of your dependents.'

Once there came two devout young men on the first day of the worship of Durga. They offered lotuses at the Mother's feet and prayed for Sannyasa. There was in their talks and demeanour an unnatural sentimentalism at which the Mother smiled; and when they showed their eagerness for Sannyasa she dissuaded them saying, 'That will come in due course, my boys.' They went away disappointed.

In her estimation, the ideal of Sannyasa was very high. About a monk she said one day, 'Why should he live with a householder just because he is ill? There are Maths and Ashramas. A monk is a model of renunciation. If a wooden female doll should lie upturned on the road, a monk shall not so much as turn it with his feet to have a look at it. And it's extremely wrong for a monk to possess money. There's nothing that the round discs can't do, even to the extent of jeopardizing life.' At times, she was strict with her own sons on these matters. Returning to

Calcutta from Rameswaram she made inquiries about a monk and was told that he had been pining to see her for the last three or four months. Instead of being flattered by this, she said with annoyance, 'How strange! A monk should go beyond attachment. Even a golden chain is no less a fetter. A monk shouldn't become a victim of attachment. What's this that they talk so often of motherly love, and complain, "I haven't been vouchsafed the Mother's love"? What's all that? To have the menfolk always moving about me, well, I don't like all that. The frame at least is human. Consideration of Divinity comes only after that. I have to live with girls and women of respectable families. Ashu used to be always stirring about upstairs in connection with making sandal-paste and such odd jobs; I reprimanded him.'

A man renounces the world in order to be freed from its worries, so that he may more fully adhere to God. Meditation on God is his bounden duty. A monk who had gone to Rishikesh, a well-known place for practising austerity at the foot of the Himalayas, wrote, 'Mother, you said, "You will see the Master in time." But I have not been granted this up till now.' On hearing the letter read, the Mother said with annoyance, 'Do write to him, "The Lord is not under any obligation to come forward to meet you just because you have gone to Rishikesh." He has become a monk. What will he do now except to call on God? God will reveal Himself when it pleases Him.'

A monk has to be vigilant about his own dignity of demeanour. Brahmachari Girija went to Jayrambati, some time in 1906. He was not yet a monk in the real sense of the term. Uncle Prasanna was then about to start for his second wedding ceremony and invited him to join the nuptial party. But the Mother intervened and said, 'He is a monk; he need not go.' Next day, at meal-time at noon the Mother said to Girija, 'My boy, shall I serve you curd?' Girija, out of natural modesty, said, 'No, I don't need it.' And the Mother added approvingly, 'Better

not take this curd, since this is associated with the marriage.'

Once when there was a proposal for Swami Shantananda's going to Banaras with a noted devotee of the Master, the Mother said, 'You are a monk; the railway fare will be so difficult for you to get. They are householders, why should you go with them? You will be travelling in the same compartment; who knows, they may say to you, "Do this, do that." You are a monk, why should you be doing all that?' As the news of one of the disciples of the Mother having changed his ochre robe for the white dress of a householder reached the Mother, she said with disgust, 'An earthen vessel can't hold a lioness's milk. By continuously eating food at the houses of wordly men his mind has become polluted.'

By showing respect towards monks and monasticism, she made people respect them. Although she granted Sannyasa to almost all of the Koalpara Ashrama, she did not give the ochre robe to young Varada because he had to run errands for the Mother and Radhu. When asking him to do certain things, the Mother used to tell him now and then, 'If you wore the ochre garment, my son, could I order you to do these? I would feel hesitant even if you touched my feet with your hands.' As this meant delay in becoming a monk, the Mother consoled him saying, 'You need have no anxiety at all. Afterwards whenever you feel the hankering you have merely to approach Sarat (Saradananda), and he will arrange for it.' For the same reason the Mother did not give Sannyasa to her boy attendant Brahmachari Hari (Haripremananda).

The Mother was present at a birthday celebration of the Master at the Belur Math. After the midday meal Brahmachari Rashbihari poured water on her hands for cleaning them; and as it was her custom to wash the feet also on such occasions, the Brahmachari poured water on her feet and proceeded to clean them with his hands, when the Mother said, 'No, no, my son, not you! You are worthy

to be worshipped by gods.' And she wiped her feet with her own hands. Rashbihari was then only a novice.

On another occasion the Mother was at the 'Udbodhan' with Radhu. The latter had anklets that jingled as she walked fast. One day as she descended quickly from the second floor to the first, the Mother heard the sound of those anklets; and when Radhu came nearer she said, 'Radhi, are you devoid of shame? Down there live all my Sannyasi sons, and you run about making your anklets jingle aloud! What will they think? Do take off your anklets at once. These boys and girls that live here, have not gathered here for the mere fun of it; they have come for spiritual practices and discipline. What will be the result if their discipline is undermined?' Radhu took off her anklets and threw them away in a huff. Another day, after bath, Radhu was seen combing her hair and tastefully arranging the locks by pressing them with a towel. This, too, annoyed the Mother, and she said so. The fact was that though she was the absolute mistress of the house, she looked to the spiritual needs of the monks for whose good she maintained all round the strictest vigilance.

This reverence for monks and anxiety for discipline were evident elsewhere as well. When she was at Koalpara with Radhu, she was dictating a list for the market to Brahmachari Varada. A woman devotee happened to pass that way, and her cloth inadvertently brushed against the Brahmachari's back. The Brahmachari hardly noticed it; but the Mother did and reproved the woman saying, 'How is this, my dear? Why do you walk about so carelessly? They are Brahmacharis. They are to be honoured. Bow down before him.'

Though the householders were as dear to her as the monks, the monks were in some sense more closely related to her. She used to say, 'My boy, if the world-renouncing ones were not there, with whom could I live?' One day an elderly woman devotee had some altercation with some

monk at the 'Udbodhan', as a result of which she left the house saying, 'By no means shall I return so long as he is there.' She defied all persuasion to retrace her steps. When the Mother came to know of all this, she felt vexed and said, 'What is she? A lay woman! If she wants to leave this place, let her do so. The monks live here after renouncing all for me.' A monk asked the Mother, 'Mother, are not all equal who have taken refuge in the Master, irrespective of their being monks or householders, inasmuch as they will all be freed?' The Mother answered, 'Good gracious! Can the monk and the householder be equal? The householders are a prey of passions and desires, while the monks have come away leaving everything behind. Whom else have these besides the Lord? Can they be compared with monks?'

Though she revered the monks, she cautioned them against pride. When Arupananda said to her, 'Mother, Sannyasa brings with it a great conceit,' the Mother corroborated him with the remark, 'Yes, a great conceit—"I haven't been saluted, I am not honoured, I have not been treated with the respect due to me!" Compared with all that, I am much better as (pointing to her white cloth) I am (i.e., with internal renunciation).'

In fact, she valued inner detachment more than outer trappings. Brahmachari Sadhan took the ochre robe from her and then inquired about the formalities he would have to go through for becoming a monk. The Mother told him slowly and solemnly, 'Faith and firmness are the basic things; if faith and firmness are there, then you have it all.' But as the Brahmachari was not satisfied with the answer, he reverted again and again to the question of ceremonies till at last the Mother was constrained to say, 'Get those things done by my sons at the (Belur) Math.'

It strikes us as though the Mother drew a line between the wearing of the ochre cloth as a help to spiritual discipline and as a reminder of a new path voluntarily chosen, and the renunciation of everything after formally perform-

ing the *Viraja-homa*, the scriptural sacrifice preceeding life-long monasticism. A clerk in the Bihar Secretariat felt disgusted with the world and came to the Mother for the ochre robe. The Mother having granted his wish, he retired to the Himalayas for austerity. As the other monks there advised him to perform the *Viraja-homa*, he sought the opinion of the Mother, who wrote in reply, 'I did not permit you to perform the *Viraja-homa* as it is a difficult matter.' The Mother, perhaps saw the inmost heart of this devotee, for he returned home after a long time.

In some cases, again, she did not sanction Sannyasa, but sent the candidates to other Sannyasis. In 1911, Swami Ramakrishnananda brought a young man named Surendra Vijay to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan' and requested her, 'Mother, this boy is accompanying me to Madras. Will you kindly initiate him into Sannyasa?' The Mother answered, 'Let Sarat do it.' But Swami Saradananda replied, 'I can't know anybody's mind; and as for Sannyasa and such things, it is for Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) to grant it or not.' Then the Mother said, 'Then let him have it at Puri from Rakhal.' Perhaps, in this case also, the Mother knew the young man's mind; for he returned home soon after.

When Swami Jagadananda approached her for Sannyasa, she gave him the ochre cloth after touching with it the feet of the Master and her own head, and then said 'I am giving you the ochre cloth; but have the *Viraja-homa* done under Rakhal's guidance at the (Belur) Math and get the (Sannyasa) name from him.'

Her attitude to Brahmachaya (the vow of celibacy), was unique. She helped many in this path. There was nothing of formality here; there was only the compassionate approval of the guru, coupled with the resolution of the disciples born of their unswerving faith and irrepressible longing. They might not belong to the Order, though many of those initiated thus entered the Ramakrishna Order in due course. We give here a single illustration.

In 1911, Surendranath Gupta went to Jayarambati and then to Kamarpukur with Brahmachari Gopesh. In course of a talk Surendranath came to learn that Gopesh was initiated into Brahmacharya by the Mother. Surendranath was then in Government service; but he longed for Sannyasa. Naturally, therefore, he was attracted towards Brahmacharya, and purchasing a new piece of cloth at Kamarpukur he returned to the Mother to get initiaton into Sannyasa. The Mother inquired about his dependants and then showed the new piece of cloth to the Master and handed it over to Brahmachari Jnan saying, 'You form it into the outer and inner garbs.' When Surendranath proposed to resign from his post, the Mother advised him to continue for some time more in service pointing out that it was good to help the Lord's devotees with a portion of one's income. He obeyed this direction for some time and then repeated this request; the Mother did not consent even then. At last after the Mother's passing away, he freed himself completely from his domestic obligations and embraced the monastic life under the name Swami Sasangananda.

As in the case of men, so also in the case of devout women seekers, the Mother was of opinion that if there were suitable arrangements for sustenance and protection, they too might lead a celibate life. When the daughter of Narayana Iyengar of Mysore wanted to take up the vow of celibacy, the Mother asked Swami Saradananda to write a letter to that effect to Sri Iyengar. On another occasion, when a girl refused to marry, her mother approached the Holy Mother to persuade the girl to obey her parents. But the Mother said, 'Is it a small misery to be a slave to another and to pander to his whims for a whole life?' And then she explained that though a celibate life had its own risks, it was improper to force any girl into wedlock against her will.

Having considered Sannyasa and Brahmacharya in passing, we return to our main topic, the Ramakrishna

Order. Though the Mother was not directly associated with its management, still she guided it from a distance through counsel and spiritual influence, and by stengthening the bonds of love. Her relationship with the different limbs of the Organisation under such circumstances is an interesting study. They were all junior to her, being disciples of the Master, of herself, or of the disciples of the Master. That relationship foreshadowed love on the one hand and obedience on the other. Still it is instructive for us to follow the extraordinary way in which she adapted herself to the needs of different types of men and women.

In 1889 Swami Brahmananda had a strong desire for undertaking austerity in some remote and lonely spot and sought the opinion of the Mother who was then at Jayrambati. She wrote to Balaram Babu, 'I hear that Rakhal desires to go to the western parts. He suffered from cold at Puri last time. It will be better if he goes in February after winter. But if his desire is irresistible, then I have nothing to say.' That was enough for Swami Brahmananda who left in December.

Although Swami Vivekananda's mind was almost decided about going to the U.S.A. in 1893, he wanted to be absolutely free from doubt and so thought, 'Well, the Mother is none else than a part of the Master. Why should In ot write a letter to her? I shall do as she asks me to.' With this idea he wrote to her asking for her blessing. The Mother was extremely happy to hear from her beloved son after such a long time. But this presented a problem also for her—should she endorse his plan? About Narendra's real stature she had indubitable proof from a vision she had at Kamarpukur after the Master's passing away. Still in the present context there was a conflict between affection and decision; though Narendra's future was undoubtedly bright, how could a mother permit her son to cross the ocean under the then existing uncertain conditions? When her mind oscillated thus between two alternatives, she saw one night in a dream, the Master walking

over the waves and beckoning Swami Vivekananda to follow him. This removed her misgivings, and she blessed the Swami's project whole-heartedly. The Swami, on his part, was elated on receipt of this letter and said, 'Hay-day, now is everything fixed up; the Mother, too, wished me to go.'

A few years after this, Swami Saradananda went to Jayarambati for seeking the Mother's benediction before starting for the U.S.A.' This time also there appeared before her the vision of the vast field of the Master's work: so she wiped her tears with one hand and with the other she blessed the Swami and said, 'The Master is protecting you for ever, my son; there's nothing to fear.'

When the Mother lived at the Bosepara Lane house in Calcutta, some time in 1898, Swami Brahmananda came there and in consultation with Swami Yogananda drafted a letter to be posted to Swami A. in America directing him in the Holy Mother's name on certain importat personal matters of health and spirituality. Then it was sent to the Mother for her opinion. She heard it through and said, 'Tell Yogen (Yogananda) and Rakhal (Brahmananda) that the letter is well written and that my wishes have been correctly conveyed. It has my full approval.'

In May 1914, a devotee came to take Swami Premananda to Malda in connection with a celebration there. The Swami agreed subject to the Mother's consent. And so they both proceeded to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan'. The Mother disagreed, for the Swami was then in bad health and Malda was a far-off and out-of-the way place; besides, a festival was fraught with personal inconveniences. The Swami bowed down to her wishes, but the devotee was in a quandary. They had now to unsettle a settled fact which was by no means so easy. Hence he remonstrated with the Mother, who recalled the Swami and said, 'Well Baburam, they are so solicitous; should you then go?' The devout son replied, 'What do I know, Mother? It shall be as you order!'

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1. The Swami left Calcutta in March 1896, and arrived in London on April 1.

At last she said, 'Go for a while; don't stay there for long.' The programme was fixed up accordingly.

Swami Shivananda was the manager of the Belur Math. Brahmachari Nagen (junior) did something awkward, because of which his friends warned him that he would be turned out of the Math by the Swami. Full of fear, the Brahmachari at once left for Jayrambati without any notice and without any change of clothes. When he reached the Mother's house with dirty clothes and haggard looks, none could imagine that he belonged to the Belur Math. After he had revealed his identity, the Mother gave him two pieces of cloth and a wrapper and had a letter written to Swami Shivananda to the effect: 'My dear son Tarak, the Junior Nagen has offended you in some way. Being afraid that you will turn him out of the Math, he has come to me covering the whole way on foot. As to that, my boy, can a mother mind her son's offence? Don't, my boy, take any action against him.' She kept Nagen with her till the reply came. By the return of post the reply came, 'We are freed from anxiety learning that younger Nagen is at your place. We had been searching for him. Kindly send him over here; there is a dearth of hands here for the worship. I shall not take any steps against him.' On receipt of the letter, Nagen went with the Mother's permission to Badanganj with Prabodh Babu who gave him a couple of shirts and railway fare up to Belur. When he arrived there, Swami Shivananda held him fast in an embrace and said, 'How now, my boy! You went to the High Court to complain against me?'

In 1912, when the Mother was in Banaras, there came a woman who related to her the poverty she was suffering from and then requested her to arrange for some monetary help from the local Ramakrishna Mission centre. The Mother answered, 'I may tell them and try. But, my daughter, all their collection is from begging. And there's no counting what a lot of people they are helping. They have to disburse what they have as they think best.'

On the one hand there was this freedom, and on the other there was a strict regulation of it. Once it was decided to dismiss the cook at the 'Unbodhan'; but the manger was shilly-shallying on the plea that this would inconvenience the Mother. Hearing of this the Mother said, 'You are monks whose one aim is renunciation; can't you get rid of a servant?' Again when the Mother came to know that a monk at the Belur Math had slapped a servant for disobedience, she commented, 'They are (homeless) monks who should live under trees. And to think that they have their Math, their house, their servant and the beating of that servant to boot!'

Though such rare occasions evoked a few caustic remarks from her, love for the monks was a dominant note of all her dealings with them. One of the Brahmacharis used to go from Belur to Calcutta in passing boats during ebb tide for marketing at Burrabazar and would return by boat; otherwise he went to the 'Udbodhan' for midday meal. Owing to difficulties of communication and uncertainties of tide, he could not intimate his movements and often appeared at meal-time without notice. This irritated Golap-Ma. And one noon as he put in an appearance, she began castigating him loudly for his indiscipline. The Mother heard of this and, coming out to the verandah from her room, said to Golap-Ma, 'Now the Master's family is daily on the increase; and one or two like these are to be expected as a matter of course. Can you help that?' Golap-Ma still argued, 'He comes just when he likes and without any notice whatever.' The Mother said, 'Howsoever that may be, you are now to serve him food without delay, it is already late; my son has come after much rummaging.' Golap-Ma twitted her by saying, 'Why so much sympathy for him? Is he your father-in-law?' Nothing abashed, the Mother asserted, 'Yes, so it is. They are my fathers-in-law, my all.'

About a fortnight before the worship of Durga in 1919, four Brahmacharis walked from Belur Math to Jay-

rambati and bowed down before the Mother. She inquired about her sons at Belur and wanted to know if the Brahmacharis had come with the permission of Swami Saradananda. They replied, 'No, Mother. In the afternoon before yesterday, as we walked out of the Math precincts and came in sight of the Grand Trunk Road, one of us said, "One can reach Banaras if one walks along this road." No sooner did he say so than the determination came to us, "Well then, let us not return to the Math and right away proceed along this road to Banaras." And thus we didn't return to the Math, or send any intimation of our action but walked along for some distance, when it struck us that since we had been walking to Banaras, it would be in the fitness of things to come to Jayrambati to take the monastic vow from you and then undertake austerity at Banaras for sometime by living on alms. That's why we have come to you.' The narration over, the Mother looked pensive for a while and then said slowly, 'Listen , my boys, it's my wish that you now return to the Math. The Durga worship will come off a few days hence. They will be in great difficulty about the various works. It was not proper for you to have come without telling Tarak (Shivananda). And you have come in this season (of malaria) without so much as informing Sarat (Saradananda). Had you told Sarat, he would not have allowed you to come.' And she added, 'Is it any less austerity to live at the Math? You have joined the Math only recently; you should live with them for some time; then everything will come slowly in due course.' The Brahmacharis were not dissuaded, but they rather kept on supplicating her for Sannyasa. Moreover, their leader asserted that they would perform austerity for a long time at Banaras with the determination of a Buddha 'to achieve the end or end the body'. The Mother was embarrassed by their doggedness, but she could not be cruel. She granted the ochre cloth to only one of them. Brahmachari Bholanath, the youngest of the group, had been introduced by her to the Belur Math, and so she was

at pains to see at least this boy return to the Math; but fidelity to the group dragged him also to Banaras.

In the meantime, Swami Shivananda guessed that the Brahmacharis had gone to Jayrambati, and he appraised the Mother of the whole situation by a letter. In answer, the Mother also informed him of all that had happened at her place. Swami Shivananda now wrote to Chandra Maharaj (Swami Nirbharananda), head of the Advaita Ashrama of Banaras not to shelter these insubordinate Brahmacharis who had defied all including the Mother. This order was followed by all concerned, except Bholanath (afterwards Swami Amareshananda) who found himself stranded and prayed for the Mother's indulgence to permit him to stay at the Advita Ashrama. Bholanath's letter moved the Mother and she said, 'Alas, he has become a prey to his group! Now he realizes how painful it is. Anyway, let us write to Chandra so that he may find refuge in the (Advaita) Ashrama itself.' And to Bholanath she wrote, 'I have written to Chandra about you; and to you I say, now that you are at Banaras, if you can live in the Master's Ashrama serving Chandra and the other monks for life, it will be to your own good.' A similar message was communicated to Swami Shivananda, who obeyed the decision unquestioningly. Bholanath fulfilled the Mother's expectation by spending the rest of his life at the Advaita Ashrama, where he breathed his last on February 4, 1948.

We now come to deal with the preservation of the Master's birth-place and arrangements for a temple to be built on it, in settling which questions the Mother had an important part to pay. When she was at the 'Udbodhan' for the last time, the Master's nephew and niece, Ramlal and Lakshmi Devi, and Ramlal's daughter came to see her on their way to Entally where they were going to attend the birthday celebration of the Master. In the course of conversation they adverted to the question of the Master's birth-place and the proposed temple on it. Lakshmi Devi wanted to know, 'When that (temple) is constructed, will

it be in our keeping, and will their (Ramlal's and Shivaram's) children themselves carry on the worship etc., and live there?' The Mother replied, 'How can that be? These are monks and devotees. Do they observe caste regulations? Innumerable people, and many foreigners from diverse countries will be going and living there and partaking of the *prasada*. We have to deal with all sorts of devotees, whereas you are householders; you have your society, your marriages for your children. How can you live with them?' The conversation proceeded in this way, and the Mother suggested that the monks of the Belur Math should take charge of the brith-place as also of the future temple, and that they should build houses with roofings of corrugated iron sheets for Ramlal and others, and a permanent brick temple for the family deities, Raghuvir and Sitala, whose worship, however, should continue to be entrusted to the family itself. But she also emphasized that Ramlal, Shivaram, and Lakshmi should live in the temple precincts and partake of the *prasada* from there whenever they chanced to stay at Kamarpukur. All present endorsed the Mother's proposals heartily and Swami Saradananda, too, was pleased to hear of this arrangement.[1]

We have already referred to the arrangement made with regard to the Mother's birth-place and the trust deed registered in favour of Jagad-dhatri. According to the Mother's wishes and the relevant deeds, the trustees of the Belur Math are the absolute managers of all these properties.

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1. In accordance with this settlement, the birth-place was handed over to the trustees of the Belur Math, by a document dated the 27th of July, 1918, which was signed by the Holy Mother and others. A little earlier, on December 14, 1917, a small piece of land contiguous to the birth-place was secured by the trustees. The construction of the temple began only after the acquisition of the Master's house on July 16, 1946. The stone temple built on the birth-place was dedicated on May 11, 1951. The trustees have built a permanent structure for the family deities, and have paid adequate sums to the descendants of Ramlal and Shivaram towards the cost of their separate houses.

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MOTHER

Finding the Mother engaged in cleaning the orts, sister Nalini, caste-ridden as she was, cried out in horror, 'Ah me! She's removing the leavings of a multitude of castes!' To this the Mother retorted, 'What if they are from various castes? They are all my children.' How could differences have any significance in her eyes who looked upon all as her children? That all-comprehending affection embraced all people—high and low, rich and poor, brahmin and non-brahmin.

The daily removal of orts was a part of the daily routine of the Mother. She would not allow the devotees to do this, assuring them that there was no lack of hands for the purpose; and then behind their backs she herself would undertake it. One day at Jayrambati, Swami Vishweshwarananda was on the point of carrying away his plate after meal when the Mother stopped him and took it away herself. The monk protested, 'Why should you carry it? I shall do it.' But the Mother said sweetly and persuasively, 'What indeed have I done for you? A child even soils its mother's lap and does so many other things? You are rare jewels to be sought for by gods.' The other women who lived with the Mother never did such a thing; on the contrary they argued, 'You are born in a brahmin family, and are a guru to boot, while these are your disciples. Why do you remove their leavings? That may bring evil on them.' The Mother answered in her own artless manner: 'Well, I am their mother. If a mother shouldn't do it all for her children's sake who else should?'

A devotee of the yogi (weaver) caste felt some hesitation in moving about freely in the Mother's house. The Mother said to him one day, 'Do you hesitate just because you are a ougi? What of that, my son? You belong to the master's fold—you are of his family, and you have

come here.' She further explained that the very fact of her not inquiring about his caste at the time of initiation showed that he just belonged to the Mothr's home; and that though rural societies were caste-ridden, nobody would raise any question at Jayarambati, nor need he be fussy about it at all.

At one time during the second day of the Durga worship, which is considered specially holy, the devotees were offering flowers at her feet after entering her room. One man, however, stood aloof. The Mother learnt from inquiry that he came from Tajpur; and though he belonged to the lowly Bagdi caste, she asked him to offer flowers just as the others had done. The man complied cheerfully.

When any devotee came to the Mother, she removed his hesitancy in the twinking of an eye—so powerful was her motherly affection. Brahmachari Rashbihari lost his mother in his childhood, and not being used to call anyone mother, he felt shy in uttering the word. One day, as the Mother wanted to send a message through him to a cousin she wanted to be sure of his having grasped her meaning and so asked him, 'Will you repeat what you will say?' Rashbihari replied, 'She has directed me to say such and such things.' 'You will say, "The Mother has directed",' said she and laid sufficient emphasis on the word 'Mother' to impress it permanently on his mind.

The Mother was once lying ill at Koalpara and a Brahmachari lived at Jayrambati. As he was very indifferent about his food and other requirements, she called him to Koalpara and asked him to be more attentive to his physical needs. He was quite young then, and yet was reserved in his dealings with the Mother; moreover, his own health was bad and he feared that this might infect the Mother. Hence he stood at a distance while talking with the Mother. The Mother asked him to come closer; but even so he kept himself at a considerable distance The Mother, therefore, chastised him saying, 'What's that! Feel my body to see how I am.' The Brahmachari then

sat by her and the Mother talked to him tenderly. At that time they used to send milk for her from Jayrambati. She said, 'Sufficient milk is available here; don't send any more milk, but you yourself should drink it plentifully.'

In fact, the relationship between the Mother and her sons seemed divinely regulated, and its expression was truly wonderful. There was the same depth and intimacy as in ordinary relationships without their concomitant bondage or attachment. There were tears and smiles, as also unruffled placidity. Sri Dwarakanath Mazumdar got his *mantra* at Jayrambati and on his way home fell ill with dysentery at Koalpara, to which he succumbed calling on the Master with folded hands to the last moment. When the news reached the Mother, she wept bitterly like any bereaved mother and said, 'A jewel of a son of mine is gone. Alas! This was my son's last birth.' She would not call her sons by their monastic names, saying by way of explanation, 'It's just because I am the mother, it hurts me to call them by their Sannyasa names.' Sannyasa means separation from all, including parents; and the Mother could not entertain that idea even in thought. Noticing this, Swami Vishweshwarananda once asked her, 'How do you look upon us?' 'As Narayana,' replied the Mother. 'We are your sons;' argued the inquirer, 'if you consider us as Narayana, you can no longer think of us as your sons.' 'I look upon you as Narayana, and as sons also,' said the Mother. As in this synthesis, the Mother's conception of sonship consists in a fusion of the human and the divine, so also in another case we get a harmonization of the finite and the infinite in her conception of motherhood. A devotee asked one day, 'I call you mother; but I want to know if you are my mother as a matter of fact.' 'If I am not your real mother,' answered the Mother, 'what else am I? I am really the mother.' 'You may say so,' argued the unconvinced devotee, 'but I don't fully understand. Why don't I have the same genuine feeling of motherhood towards you, as I have spontaneously toward my own

mother?' The Mother first deplored saying, 'Alas, what a pity!' And then she added, 'The same entity is the parent of all, my child, the same has taken shape as fathers and mothers.' It is perhaps sad that the truth did not dawn on the devotee, but that was no reason why her own universal Motherhood should not be clear as daylight to herself. The Mother that was in her, 'the divinity that manifests itself as mothers among all beings' (*Chandi*), satisfied in the forms of the finite mothers the cravings for love in the hearts of finite beings. This infinite and all-embracing Motherhood of hers spoke so sweetly through every word, every movement and every act, that a mere touch of it melted the hardest heart.

Radhu had a pet cat for which the Mother provided half a pound of milk every day. She lay quietly and fearlessly at the Mother's feet; and even if for silencing others' complaints she feigned to drive it away with a stick, the cat took shelter, between her feet nevertheless, so that the Mother had to throw away the stick and smile, and the others too had to follow suit. Cats are given to stealing. But this did not annoy the Mother who said, 'To steal is their nature, my boy; who will feed them fondly?' But Brahmachari Jnan declared a war against the cat. One day, when he flung her away, the Mother looked pale with pain. Beating the cat also was a common occurrence. In spite of this dislike, the family of this cat throve through the care bestowed on it by Radhu and the Mother. And then came the time for the Mother's departure for Calcutta. The Mother called the Brahmachari to her and said, 'Jnan, you should cook rice for the cats, so that they may not have to go to other houses; for then people will abuse us, my boy.' This was a common argument, by which, the Mother knew, the lot of the cats might not improve overnight. And hence she added, 'Look here, Jnan, don't beat the cats; for even in them am I.' That was enough; the Brahmachari could no longer lift his hand against the cats. And he went so far

as to arrange for a regular supply of fish for them, although he himself was a strict vegetarian!

In one sense she was the Mother of all the devotees, and in another she herself was all; her infinite motherhood left none outside its all-comprehensive grasp. Brahmachari Rashbihari asked her one day, 'Are you the Mother of all?' 'Yes,' replied the Mother. 'Even of these lower creatures?' pressed the inquirer. 'Yes,' answered the Mother.

But the mother in her was not satisfied even with so many children. She was often heard calling in a low tone, 'Come to me here, my children.' When Swami Vishweshwarananda reached Jayrambati, the Mother said eagerly, 'So you have come, how fine! I have been calling you for the last few days—when calling Rajen I have been uttering your name.' The Mother was careful never to show her emotion; and that is why this anxiety could often find but partial expression. Yet the little that came out revealed a world of hidden feeling.

As Swami Maheshwarananda was returning to the Belur Math from the 'Udbodhan', the Mother gave him a rupee to be handed over to Swami Premananda, and said, 'This is to be spent for the Master's worship, and for offering *tulasi* (holy basil) leaves for the welfare of Sarat, by name.' Swami Saradananda was then down with fever.

The Mother once heard from Sri Prabhakar Mukherji of Arambagh that his son was suffering from measles. When the devotee was returning home from Jayrambati the Mother gave him a rupee, saying, 'Offer worship to Sitala at Kamarpukur on your way.' That was meant for invoking the goddess's grace for the boy.

Noticing Bibhutibhushan Ghosh eating lustily at the Mother's house at Jayrambati, his mother Rohinibala remarked, 'Bibhuti seems to eat here heartily; but at my place he eats only this much (indicating a small quantity with the fingers).' The Mother at once protested, 'Don't you be casting an evil eye on my son! I am a beggar; whatever I offer to my sons, they eat with avidity.'

In fact, in her words and manner there was such a genuineness and cordiality that a new-comer felt at once drawn to her. When a woman devotee came to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan' (February 1911) the Mother said, 'How are you? How is my daughter-in-law? You didn't come all these days, and I was wondering if you had fallen ill.' The devotee wondered how a single meeting for a few minutes could ripen into such intimacy. The matter did not, however, end there. With the greatest affection the Mother made her sit near her on the cot and said, 'It seems, my daughter, as though I have seen you many a time as though it's an acquaintance of long standing.' As the time for the devotee's returning home approached, the Mother brought her some *prasada* and holding it to her lips said, 'Eat.' The devotee felt rather shy, but the Mother said encouragingly, 'Why be so shy? Take it.' So the devotee took the food in her hands. When at last she bade adieu the Mother inquired, 'Will you be able to go down? Shall I accompany you?' And she went to the staircase to see her off. The same devotee came to the Mother in the summer of that year, tired and perspiring. The Mother said eagerly, 'Take off your blouse and let your body be cooled;' and as she spoke, she took down a fan and tried to comfort her. The more the devotee protested, 'Give me the fan, I shall move it myself' the more the Mother said with affection, 'Don't you mind that, don't; be a little cooled.'

The same devotee came in October 1912, and after partaking of the *prasada* at noon began fanning the Mother, who, however, said, 'Fetch a pillow from there and lie down by me. I don't require any more breeze.' Thinking it to be sacrilegious to use the Mother's pillow, the devotee no sooner fetched one from Radhu's room than the Mother laughed and said, 'That's the mad one's (Radhu's mother's) pillow, my dear; bring the other one; there's no harm in this.' And to Radhu she said, 'Radhu, you too come, and lie down by your sister.'

A woman devotee of the Vaidya caste was permitted to cook and bring from her home some dishes for the Mother. One day in August 1918, as she stepped in with those preparations, the Mother said, 'Look here, my dear, with how much trouble she has come with all these!' 'Why, it is you who want them! That's why they bring them,' ejaculated Nalini Devi, rather critically. 'Well,' asserted the Mother, 'why should I not ask what I want from them? They are my daughters.' The Mother was pleased on tasting those preparations that night; and even Nalini, so notoriously squeamish was forced to say, 'What wonder! Though I can't relish anybody's cooking, yet I don't feel any repulsion when eating her preparations?' At this the Mother said with pride, 'Why should you? For she is my daughter, to be sure.'

A young man sat in front of the Mother on the northern verandah of her room at the 'Udbodhan' and confessed, 'Mother, I've suffered quite a lot in the world. You are my guru, you are my chosen deity, I know nothing else. In truth I've committed so many wrongs, that I blush to speak of them even before you. And yet I continue to live by your grace.' The Mother caressed his head tenderly as she said solacing him, 'A son to a mother, a son!' That melted the man's heart and he said, 'Yes Mother! But may I never think that your grace is so cheap, just because I have got so much of it from you.'

Some devotees, after reaching the Koalpara Ashrama at sunset during the Janmashtami holidays (Krishna's birthday in August), 1913, decided to reach Jayrambati that very night. It was dark and it began to pour heavily on the way. When they reached Jayrambati, the Mother was not informed. Next morning as they saluted her, she reproached them saying, 'My sons, the Master has saved you. In that darkness, slush, and downpour, you must have trampled over many a snake. It pains me to see one walk in that way. It is no good walking recklessly.' The devotees tried to explain that their leave was short and

their desire to see her was great, and that these compelled them to be a bit rash.' The Mother still persisted, 'It's natural to be so on your part; but it pains me.' She recollected the incident two and a half years later, when the wife of one of these devotees arrived at the 'Udbodhan' (December 25, 1915). That day at about nine or ten in the morning, the Mother sat on the floor with some crisp fried-rice and other fried things in the folds of her cloth, from which she took a handful now and then and also offered some to the new-comer saying, 'Take it, my daughter-in-law, take it.' That evening when the devotee came to take his wife home the Mother, alluding to the Jayrambati incident, said, 'It's not good to walk about recklessly.' The devotee assured her, 'No, I shall not do so any more.' The Mother understood this to mean that he would not go to Jayrambati, and so she quickly interposed, 'Why should you not go? My son, if a thorn pricks your foot, it hurts me like a spear entering my heart.' And turning to the devotee's wife, she said, 'Daughter-in-law, dear, you should keep a watch on him, so that he doesn't walk in this way.'

A baby who slept by the Mother's side at the 'Udbodhan' soiled her blanket. As the baby's mother proceeded to clean the blanket, the Mother snatched it from her and washed it herself. When the child's mother objected, 'Mother, why should you wash it?' the Mother replied briefly but feelingly, 'Why should I not? Is she (the baby) a stranger to me?'

The number of devotees is swelling. They come to the 'Udbodhan' at all hours of the day; their tastes differ and needs vary. The Mother has no rest, and inconveniences multiply. This enrages the outspoken Golap-Ma, who criticizes her saying, 'What's this that has come upon you, Mother? You put forward your feet to anyone who approaches you and calls you Mother!' The Mother pleads, 'How can I help it, Golap? I can't contain myself when one draws near me and calls me Mother.'

This affection of the Mother was not confined to devotees alone; it transcended the limits of all social and family barriers and submerged everybody in its resistless tidal rush. The Mother while dictating a letter to Sri Bholanath Chatterji, uncle-in-law of Radhu, said without the least hesitation, 'Write "My dear son".' 'How is that, my dear?' interrupted Radhu's mother. 'He is certainly related to you otherwise through Radhu.' Not the least abashed the Mother said, 'Let that alone; he loves to call me Mother, and I also am so to him.' Her sisters-in-law, Indumati Devi and Suvasini Devi, also addressed her as Mother.

The villagers, too, had a share of this overflowing love. Once, after the Mother's recovery from an illness, some people wanted to sacrifice a goat before Simhavahini; but the Mother offered *rasagollas* (juice-balls) worth some rupees. In the afternoon, no sooner was the bell rung twice from the Mother's house than the villagers, who had become trained in such matters by that time, flocked to the place and sat in rows on either side of the road. The monks served the *rasagollas* to them and the Mother looked on with a sweet smile on her lips.

The devotees had evidences of her motherly heart in every little detail of life, so much so, that they found no difference between her and their own mothers. At the very first contact she became acquainted with each one's taste and attended to him or her accordingly. Nalin Babu sat at meal at Jayrambati with about fifteen other devotees, and thinking all the while that the Mother was most attentive to his needs, felt a little uncomfortable. But on comparing notes with others after meal, he found to his surprise that they too had felt the same tender concern of the Mother for each of them.

At the time of distributing *prasada*, it was noticed that she gave each one the particular thing he liked most. The first one that came got the best that he could think of; similarly the second one, and so also the third. Everybody was satisfied that the Mother loved him the most.

And she fulfilled one's desire before one could open one's lips. The Mother was at her meal when a certain monk arrived at Jayrambati. It was his cherished idea to have the Mother's *prasada*, left from the Mother's own plate. But such was her habit that she sat for meal after feeding all her sons. So the monk had not got any opportunity so far. This time, as soon as he arrived, the Mother sent him some light refreshment and tobacco, for she knew that he smoked, and when she had finished her meal, she called him in and said, 'Sit down, my son. I have eaten from those leaves.' She had used *sal* leaves and all the eatables were there arranged properly.

The Mother treated all her sons with equal tenderness, for no man is entirely guiltless. Once a direct disciple of the Master was so offended with the conduct of a certain devotee that he requested the Mother not to allow him to get anywhere near her. But she replied, 'If my son wallows in the dust or mud, it is I who have to wipe all the dirt from off his body and take him to my lap.'

Hundreds of sufferers came to her with their burdens of sins and woes. Their touch often produced pain in her feet, but she bore this knowingly and willingly. One afternoon, when the visitors had left, Brahmachari Rashbihari saw the Mother washing her feet up to the knees again and again. When asked for the reason she said, 'Don't allow anyone any more to salute me by laying his head on my feet; thereby all the sins enter there, and my feet burn, so that I have to wash them. That's why I fall ill. Ask them to salute me from a distance.' But she changed her mood immediately saying, 'Don't tell these things to Sarat (Saradananda), for he will then stop salutation altogether.'

It was palpably evident to her that the touch of a sinner was painful; but though evident, how could she, a mother, refuse her own sons to touch her feet? Besides, she could not so much as see anybody's fault. One evening she said to Brahmachari Varada, 'When G. and

others came to pay their respects to me this morning, they made certain reflections against A. and said that he had quarrelled with the monks at Rishikesh and was trying to give them trouble. And casting some more aspersions against him they added, "How could he have such an evil propensity after having lived with you and served you so long?" I can no longer see or listen to anyone's defect, my son. It shall be as each has earned in his past lives. If they were destined to have a deep wound, they must have at least the prick of a pin. They talked of A,'s fault to me! Where were they in those days? How serviceable he was to me! In those days I boiled paddy and did all kinds of work in my brother's family. He started working with me from the morning without caring for sun or rain, and with his body covered with soot he took down big vessels of paddy from the oven. Many are there now who come here as devotees; but whom had I then? Should we forget it all? And yet, mind you, people are not really to blame. Formerly, I also took notice of a lot of other people's drawbacks. Then, by praying for long to the Master with tearful eyes "Master, I can no more bear finding fault" could I at last get rid of the habit of picking holes in other people's clothes. When I was at Vrindaban, I used to visit Vankubihari (Krishna in a bent pose) and prayed to him, "Your form is bent, but Your mind is straight—kindly straighten the windings of my mind." Mark you, even though you might have a hundred times benefited a man and then happen to do him one wrong, he will take umbrage. People can easily discover others' defects but few can recognize merit. One should appreciate merit.'

An educated young man belonging to a well-to-do family of a neighbouring village had the good fortune of receiving initiation from the Mother. He used to come to her very often. Through his help an Ashrama was started in that village. But as ill luck would have it, he became involved in a love affair with a near relative who was a

widow from her early age. Now, scandals have wings; and the Jayrambati devotees came to know of this very soon. In their anger they appealed to the Mother to stop his coming to her house. The Mother was visibly moved at this lapse of her son; but to their request she replied, 'How can I, who am his mother, forbid him to come? Such words will never pass out of my lips.' The young man continued to come as usual. Not only this, he brought the girl also one day. The Mother reproached her for enticing her son and warned her for the future; but she was as unwaveringly affectionate with her as with any of her other daughters.

We allude to another incident which happened much earlier. The Mother then lived at the 10/2 Bosepara Lane house. A servant had been driven out by Swami Vivekananda for stealing. The man was poor and his family depended on him. Now he found himself in a most difficult position and ran to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan' for shelter. The Mother kept him there and fed him. That very afternoon, when Swami Premananda happened to go there to pay his respects to her, she said, 'Look here, Baburam, this man is very poor. He was impelled by his poverty to do as he did. Should Naren on that score scold him and drive him out? The world is full of misery. You are monks who realize very little of it. Take him back.' Swami Premananda tried to impress on her that this would displease Swami Vivekananda. The Mother then said with some emphasis, 'I say, take him.' As Swami Premananda entered the Math compound at dusk, Swami Vivekananda burst out, 'Look at Baburam's thoughtlessness; he has brought that fellow again!' Swami Premananda then explained everything, which silenced the great Swami.

As it became known that even rebellious minds bowed down before the might of her motherly love, the weaker parties defeated in life's struggles used to seek her intervention, and it was found that the stronger ones accepted with alacrity whatever decision she arrived at. One day as she was seated on a cot under a tamarind tree at Koal-

para, there came a woman of the sweeper caste who complained that her paramour had suddenly deserted her. She had been living with him after having cut off all her moorings, and now she was stranded. The woman wept bitterly as she related her tale of woe. The Mother was moved very much and sent for the sweeper and rebuked him gently and persuasively, saying, 'She came to you leaving everything behind; and you have accepted her services so long. If you desert her now, you will incur great sin, you won't find a place even in hell.' The man's heart was touched at these words, and he took the woman home.

The Mother's infinite love transcended all limitations of caste or colour, merit or demerit, in fact, of all conditions of life. Any one that took refuge in her, was treated kindly, helped with medicines and other necessities, and filled with sympathy. She consciously ignored people's frailties and foibles, and asked others also to do the same. The result was that even criminals behaved decently and sometimes changed their habits.

Mulberry was once widely cultivated and silk-worms reared in many villages of West Bengal. But foreign competition tolled the death-knell of this industry at the beginning of the present century, as a consequence of which many Mohammedan families at Shiromanipur were reduced to penury. No honest means of livelihood being open to them, the hapless Mohammedans took to stealing and robbery, which earned for them the appellation of 'mulberry-robbers' (*tunte'-dakat*). They were a terror to the neighbouring villages, including Jayrambati. Naturally, they were studiously shunned by the Hindus. And to add to the misery of these wretched families, a famine raged in those parts. Just then, the new house of the Mother was being built, and the monks who supervised the work engaged some of these famine-stricken people. The villagers did not take this kindly and often grumbled that the monks were courting trouble for themselves and the

villagers. Nonetheless they had to change their opinion soon and declare, 'Ah! By the Mother's grace, the robbers too, are becoming devotees!' How this happened can be realized from the following few anecdotes.

One day, one of these 'mulberry-robbers' brought some plantains to the Mother and said, 'Mother, here are some plantains for the Master; will you accept them?' The Holy Mother stretched out her hands for acceptance and said, 'Certainly I will, my dear; hand them over. Why should I not, since you have brought them for the Master?' A woman devotee who hailed from a neighbouring village and happened to be there, was taken aback by this strange behaviour of the Mother, and she said warningly, 'These are thieves, you know. Why should his things be offered to the Master?' The Mother, apparently unperturbed by this rude interference, deposited the fruits in the store and ordered some fried-rice and sweets for the man. When he had gone, she turned to the woman and administered a stern rebuke, 'I know who is good and who is not.' Her mission was to uplift the spiritually fallen, and she used to say, 'To err is human; but how few know, how to lead an erring man?'

Amzad was one of those 'mulberry-robbers' who had a hand in erecting the mud walls of the Mother's house. One day the Mother seated him on her verandah for his meal. Nalini Devi served him, but owing to caste prejudices she stood at a distance on the courtyard and tossed the food on to the man's leaf-plate. This displeased the Mother, who said, 'Can one have any relish for food if it is served in such a fashion? If you can't serve him properly, I shall do it.' When Amzad had finished his meal, the Mother cleansed the place herself. At this, Nalini Devi loudly denounced the act saying, 'O dear aunt, you lose your caste thereby!' But the Mother cut her short, 'Amzad is as truly my son as my Sarat (Saradananda) himself is.'

The next incident followed soon after. The Mother was down with fever, and many visited her in her sick-bed.

One morning, at about nine or ten o'clock, the Brahmachari on attendance saw a Mohammedan of dark appearance, emaciated body, ragged clothes, and sad looks, tottering into Mother's compound with the help of a staff. From his unhesitating movements it was apparent that the man, though unknown to the Brahmachari, was quite a familiar figure there. But curiosity urged him to follow the man. The Mother was inside, lying on a cot in her room, and the verandah in front was covered by a thin screen of plaited bamboo slips, so that the cot was not easily visible. The man tiptoed to look over the screen. Suddenly the Mother's eyes turned in that direction, and she accosted him in a low endearing voice, 'Is that you, dear Amzad? Come in.' With beaming eyes and a happy countenance Amzad stepped on to the verandah and standing on one side of the door thrust in his head to enter into an intimate conversation on matters of everyday life. Finding the Mother and her son thus engaged, the Brahmachari went about his own duties.

Not long after, the Brahmachari was called in to offer food to the Master. The Mother herself used to do this when she was well; but now she could not move about, and so the Brahmachari had to undertake this ceremony, which, however, was a very simple one. In the Mother's room, under the Master's seat, was kept some Ganges water which had to be poured into a small ceremonial vessel, technically called *panchapatra* and with this water the food in the kitchen had to be sanctified for being offered to the Master. The Brahmachari came to take the *panchapatra* but was in a dilemma finding the Mohammedan standing in the only doorway. He could not be told to move away, lest this should offend the Mother. At the same time, to pass closely by a Mohammedan, with the holy water in hand militated against caste prejudices and conventions ingrained from childhood in this Brahmachari who was a brahmin by birth. He hesitated for a moment and then decided to carry out his duty without minding the man's presence.

depending on the Mother to dissuade him if there was anything wrong in his move. He took the *panchapatra* and stepped out. After the offering he returned with it and placed it where it was. Amzad was all the while at his post. The Mother noticed everything but said nothing. As Amzad was leaving, in the evening, the Brahmachari noticed that the man's face was lit up with a happy smile, and he was altogether a changed person. He had bathed and rubbed oil all over his rough skin; then he had a full meal; and now he chewed betel and areca-nut as he walked home. In his hand was a phial of indigenous medicine, and in his bag were many titbits. The Mother told the Brahmachari, 'Amzad's brain has become heated as a result of taking stimulants. He has no sleep at night. I had with me for a long time a phial of Narayana oil, which I have given him. By using it his brain will be cooled; it is a very efficacious oil;.' Amzad soon recovered from his illness and was always at the Mother's service. If anything had to be done, the moment word was sent to him, he would faithfully carry it out. For instance, when the Mother lost her appetite as a result of protracted fever, her physician recommended pineapples, which were by no means easily available in those parts and in that season. So Amzad's services were requisitioned, and he soon brought the pineapples, as if by magic.

But in spite of this divine affection of the Mother, Amzad could not free himself wholly from the habit of thieving and robbing; and so the people of Jayrambati were afraid of him, though, as a matter of fact, that village remained free from the attention of those 'mulberry-robbers', evidently through Amzad's good offices. Often enough he was in jail, when his wife would run for help to the Mother who would give her whatever lay at hand. This love was heartily reciprocated by Amzad. Once after his release from jail, he found on returning home a number of gourds hanging down from his thatch. He plucked some of them and proceeded to Jayrambati. The Mother, delighted

to see him, said, 'I have been anxious because of your long absence. Where were you?' Amzad explained that he had been arrested on a charge of cattle-lifting, and so he could not visit her. Unmindful of the explanation, the Mother said with a sigh. 'Ah me! I have been really worried.'

When the Holy Mother was in Calcutta during her last illness, the news reached her that Amzad had been apprehended on a charge of robbery after having absconded for some time. At this information she said, 'Ah me! Look here, my dear, I knew that he was an adept in robbery.' It is said that after the passing away of the Mother, Amzad received a cut from a sword in an act of plundering. This wound developId into a sore and ultimately caused his death. The Mother knew this man's character well enough, and she also knew it to be her duty to protect her household and her village from people of his trade. But the method she adopted consciously through the promptings of her motherly heart was not only unique but also effective. It won the robber's heart and brought for her a result that even mightier people with ampler resources would have failed to achieve. She did not rely on arms or man-power, but on the power of love which softened the hardest criminal and which brooked no interference from caste, prejudice, or fear.

If we illustrate the Mother's life merely with citations from her relationship with cultured, intelligent, and affluent devotees, some may think, 'This is not very extraordinary.' Hence it is that we have dealt with Amzad a little elaborately. In support of our view, we shall continue to draw some more examples from common life.

Shortly after the construction of the Mother's house at Jayrambati, a devotee purchased a milch cow for her and arranged for its maintenance as well. At his cost, again, was engaged for tending the cow, a boy named Govinda (or Gobe), aged about eleven or twelve years. He was well-behaved and ever cheerful. But in a few days itches

spread over his whole body, defying treatment and causing pain. One night the pain became so excruciating that he had not a wink of sleep and wept all the while. Next morning the Mother sat on her verandah with a grinding stone on which she prepared a paste with green *neem* (margosa) leaves and turmeric, and making the boy stand before her asked him to apply it to the different parts of his body according to her direction. Govinda obeyed cheerfully and unhesitatingly as he would have done before his own mother; and this treatment cured him ultimately.

Haridas Vairagi of Desra used to sing, in accompaniment of his violin, religious songs which enkindled devotion in the hearts of his hearers, among whom he could count Girishchandra Ghosh, Swami Saradananda and others. But as he grew old, it became increasingly difficult for him to maintain himself. One day he came to the Mother's house a little before noon. The Mother gave him oil for rubbing over his rough skin before bath. When he returned after a dip in the tank, she gave him some fried-rice molasses and *prasada*. As he ate these, the Mother sat by him, talking on familiar things and preparing betel rolls. The First World War (1914–18) was raging at that time causing great scarcity of cloth. The old man said that he had no clothes. The Mother had spread in the sun after her morning ablution a new piece of cloth which she had worn but a couple of days. She got up at once and handed it over to the Vairagi. Haridas was overpowered with that evidence of the Mother's affection, and touching the cloth reverently to his head he bade her farewell with wet eyes.

We may mention in passing that this love of the Mother extended to dumb creatures as well. One day a calf was restlessly bleating, which made all infer that it had some pain in the stomach. The Mother, satisfied as she was with the little she had, was against multiplying the vexations of a household by purchasing cattle; and hence when the question was put to her, she gave her un-

willing consent with a view not to wound the feelings of the proposer, and then said to Brahmachari Gogan (Swami Ritananda), 'Mark you, what desire!'—as though she was witnessing from a distance, without any personal concern, the intricate workings of people's minds engrossed in worldly dealings. And when the cow came, she remarked, 'He has only left us in greater trouble by purchasing the cow.' Nonetheless, she meticulously supervised everything concerning it and its calf. The calf went on making an uneasy noise which set everybody athinking and they tried various remedies without success. The bleating brought the Mother also there; she sat by the calf holding it in both arms and softly pressing its navel and patting it, as though it were her own child. A little later it calmed down and all returned to their respective places.

In the Mother's house there was a maina (a talking parrot) named Gangaram. The Mother herself daily washed the bird, gave it water and food, cleaned its cage, moved it from place to place and talked with it tenderly. Every morning and evening she went to him and said, 'Dear Gangaram, do talk!' The bird articulated, 'Hare' Krishna, Hare Rama, Krishna, Krishna, Rama, Rama.' Hearing the names of the Brahmacharis from the Mother's lips, Gangaram learnt them well enough. And now and then it shrieked out, 'Mother, O Mother.' The Mother immediately responded with, 'Here I am, my son, here I am,' and she went to it with gram and water, for the bird's call meant that it was hungry. As far the Mother's love for cats, we have mentioned the fact before.

Now, we return to the devotees. In every word and movement, her motherliness was so strikingly evident that any one who happened to come within its orbit had some of his life's wants removed at once without any effort, Brahmachari Rashbihari, having lost his mother as a child, felt an inexpressible void in the deep recesses of his heart. Other children called on their mothers affectionately and had their feelings reciprocated; but he had none to turn

to. When as a young man he came to the Mother, he felt as though she had been waiting there all the time with a heart full to the brim with affection for him. A little touch of it changed his whole life.

Cases were not rare when young boys, coming to her, found her features exactly like those of their own mothers. True it is that this was not a matter of daily occurrence with them; but the first, and might be, the single vision spread a lasting influence over the whole of a man's life. When Swami Mahadevananda saw the Mother at Jayarambati he thought that his own mother was seated in front of him. Sri Panchanan Ghosh once went to see the Mother in his boyhood. As he was entering the Mother's room for saluting her, he chanced to look at her feet, which, to his utter amazement, were exactly like those of his mother; and the two hands on her lap with the golden bracelets resembled those of his mother who had then just been widowed. Past memories and present identity crowded over his mind to make him half-conscious. He drew slowly towards the Mother, step by step, urged by an unknown impulse. Once in front of the Mother, he looked again at her full figure, from the feet upwards to the face—all was exactly the same. The Mother noticed his emotional transformation and said affectionately, 'Why are you looking so, my son? What has happened to you, my dear? Come here, my boy, come.' Panchanan sat quite close by her and the Mother passed her affectionate hand over his back. That blissful touch made the boy's hair stand on end, and he felt as though he had met his own mother after a long interval.

A certain young devotee came, and finding the Mother none other than his own mother in every way, took it into his head like a child to sit for meal by her, and not stopping at that he said capriciously that he would not eat unless she fed him with her own hand. The Mother yielded to his importunity. Then he demanded that her veil must be removed before he could eat. Again she complied and

also talked with him about his family in the most endearing way. Such an occurrence was not rare. We have related earlier how Nag Mahashaya was fed.

When Swami Prashantananda saw the Mother's picture after the death of his own mother, he came to believe that there was an identity between the two. And hence he behaved towards the Mother accordingly when he first met her at Jayrambati. At that time he was a mere boy, and a doctor used to come on horseback to the Mother's place every day. Prashantananda began clamouring for a ride on that horse which was a naughty one, and, therefore, the Mother demurred. But Prashantananda's importunity compelled her to take the doctor's permission, which being readily given, Prashantananda sat astride the horse. But to control a naughty animal was no job for a stripling. No sooner was he in the saddle than the horse bolted homeward. At long last when he returned with the animal to the Mother his cloth was found torn and his body bleeding from scratches received while dashing past throny trees and bamboo groves. The Mother was looking out all the while in great consternation; and when this wilful child returned she chid him and brought out for him a new piece of cloth.

Though the relationship between the Mother and her devotees was regulated by affection, yet the indiscretion of some devotees made it very often taxing, nay, even painful, to the Mother, who, however, bore it all in silence without changing her mood towards the person concerned. A Brahmachari saw one day that two devotees who had come to Jayrambati, were going to the Mother to worship her with water, flowers, *bel* leaves, etc. The Brahmachari forbade them to pour water or offer *bel* leaves on her feet since her legs were rheumatic and she had just recovered from an illness; besides, she did not like *bel* or *tulasi* leaves being offered at her feet as these were sacred to Siva and Vishnu respectively. The devotees treated his warning lightly and proceeded to do as they had planned.

At this the Brahmachari was forced to stop them rudely; but then he was afraid that the Mother had taken it amiss. She, however, told him afterwards, 'You should be near me and keep an eye on everything. At the "Udbodhan" they save me carefully from trouble in so many ways.'

We shall relate an incident in 1909, when Swami Saradananda was at Jayrambati. A young man turned up one day to see the Mother. The Brahmachari who had accompanied the Swami conducted the young man to the Mother. The stranger saluted her and then began pulling her legs under the foolish impulse of holding her feet on to his chest. Fortunately she then stood holding a post of the cottage and so did not fall down. The Brahmachari quickly took hold of the crazy man and led him out. When Swami Saradananda heard the whole affair he remarked. 'Yogin Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) never bowed down to the Mother while she was in a standing position; when she left, he took the dust from the place and put it on his head.'

Such queer behaviour was not confined to that remote past. Subsequently, too, some devotee might come to Jayrambati and demand immediate interview defying all persuasion to wait for the Mother's convenience. She had therefore to come out and stand on a low wooden stool like an image to accept the devotee's floral offering after which she had to hurry back to the kitchen to cook some food for that inconsiderate man himself.

A devotee expressed a desire that since he would be leaving for home in three or four days, he would like to have some rice from the Mother's plate, dry it and carry it home as her *prasada*. In due time the Mother showed him the rice *prasada* and said, 'That's yours, my dear.' The food was in a brass plate, and the devotee put it in the sun for drying. The Mother warned him, 'Mind you that the crows don't peck at it.' The devotees assured her that he would be returning immediately to watch it, and he went to the outer apartment for a smoke, in the course of

which he forgot everything and then fell asleep. When he woke up at three in the afternoon, he remembered the plate and hurried inside to find, to his utter confusion, the Mother still sitting by it. 'Didn't you have any rest today, Mother?', faltered the devotee. 'No, my son', replied she. 'I kept watching, lest that thing of yours should be pecked by crows.'

A woman, when taking leave of the Mother, bit her big toe. The Mother shrieked out in pain, 'Hello, my dear, what kind of a devotion is that! If she wants to bow down, let her do so; but instead, she holds my toe in her teeth!' 'It's just to make you remember', explained the woman. 'I never saw', said the Mother, 'such a device for making one remember.'

Some devotee might hold fast the Mother's feet and plead, 'Mother, do promise me that you will show yourself to me at least at the time of my death.' The Mother replied, 'Very well, I shall pray to the Master that he may vouchsafe his presence.' But the devotee still kept his firm grasp on her feet till at last the Mother found no means of escape but to say, 'Yes, my son, it shall be so.'

Brahmachari Varada had gone to a distant village to procure fuel. When he returned to Jayrambati at night-fall, he found the Mother lying on a mat in the verandah. As the Brahmachari approached her she said ruefully, 'You all are here; and yet you have to go out on business. To day there came a man, somewhat advanced in age. Seeing him from a distance, I entered the room and sat on my cot. He saluted me from outside and then became eager to take the dust of my feet. The more I said, "No, no," with modesty, the more he pressed. At last he took the dust almost by force. From that time I am suffering from a burning sensation in the feet and a pain in the stomach. I washed the feet three or four times, but still the pain and the burning sensation persist. If you had been nearby, you could have ascertained my wish and forbidden him. The strictness that they enforce in Calcutta with regard

to the devotees cannot wholly be dispensed with. You are too young to understand what diverse kinds of people come.'

The Mother was not entirely free from this kind of unwelcome visitors even in Calcutta. One day, as the Mother rose from her seat after finishing her worship a devotee came with some flowers to offer them at her feet. As the man was a stranger, she covered herself fully with a wrapper and sat on a cot with her feet hanging down. The devotee got his opportunity and began worshipping her to his heart's content with all the elaborate processes and *mantras* that the scriptures enjoin, unmindful of the fact that the Mother was perspiring all over, though she could not utter a word. It was nothing unusual to see a devotee offer flowers at her feet, and hence the ever watchful Golap-Ma was a little off her guard when she saw the man enter the room. Without due notice, she went away to attend to her own duties. But when returning after a long time, she found him still there, she became irritated at the man's silliness and said with her naturally loud voice, 'Are you here before a wooden image that you should invoke her with all your ceremonies (with their meditation on letters[1] and control of breath)? Don't you see that the Mother is sweating uncomfortably?' And she sent the man out.

It was at the 'Udbodhan', again, that a devotee, while bowing down to the Mother, struck his head so hard against her big toe that she had to utter a cry of pain. The others present there asked the man, 'What's this that you have done?' The man replied, 'By thus saluting the Mother I leave her with some pain in the feet, and she will remember me as long as the pain is there.' The Mother used to regale her attendants with such funny stories when they massaged her rheumatic legs with oil.

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1. An image has to be awakened by establishing mentally its identity with the worshipper through certain processes, one of which is Nyasa consisting partly in thinking that the different limbs of the Deity are composed of various letters of the alphabet; She being thus none other than an embodiment of

At times, the Mother was so unbearably uncomfortable that, notwithstanding her forbearance, she could not but give vent occasionally to her irksomeness to the Master or the faithful attendants. One morning some well-dressed gentlemen came from Calcutta with some fruits, which through negligence had become rotten and so created a problem for the Mother as to how and where they were to be placed. They had forgotten to bring their towels with them; and as the ordinary ones which the Mother's household could boast of could not be offered to these genteel people, she had to search a long time for some presentable ones. And, then, it transpired that they had brought no strings for their mosquito nets, and so Brahmachari Hari had to run about for procuring some. Hard put to it, the Mother was heard soliloquizing. 'How pestered I am by all these people! I am fed up with it all. Some of the boys come and my household seems to be filled with peace; I have nothing to worry about. They eat without murmur whatever comes to hand and then get up taking along with them the leaves on which they eat. And look at these others! I am all agog from the morning. And now the problem is, what curry should be cooked for the night? Master, do you mind your own family. I am no longer able to cope with this. Radhu is trouble enough and here are these others in the bargain.'

Are such reactions indicative either of a disgust mixed with affection or of demonstration before the attendants of the difference between two types of devotion, the one which delights in show and reveals its ineptitude at every turn and the other which though quiet and undemonstrative, yet consists in pure love mixed with faith? Before we arrive at any conclusion let us deal with some more incidents of a similar type. Apropos of this, we may say that under similar circumstances, the Master's attitude also differed in accordance with the mental states of the

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knowledge as expressible in thought and words, or in other words identical with consciousness as embodied in human beings.

devotees. Moreover, those who are not fully acquainted with the Jayrambati life of the Mother, will not realize how the Mother, who was adored on the one hand as the Universal Mother by many and who directed the destinies of innumerable others, had yet to court untold physical labour and undergo mental worries, even in her old age, all for the sake of making others contented. And in particular, we have to remember that the incident cited last happened at a time when the passing away of the Mother was not far away, and when she dropped hints off and on about that sad day. It is not difficult for any intelligent reader to see that, though the above soliloquy apprarently expresses her vexation, yet below the surface is the covert forewarning of her impending departure. In the chapters 'Radhu' and 'In A Domestic Setting', we have seen how she had been praying to the Master for release from her earthly mission. The concluding sentences of the above soliloquy only underline that sentiment.

Almost contemporaneously with the above incident, one day, in early winter, a devotee came to Jayrambati with his wife and four daughters. They had started from Garbeta the previous afternoon, by bullock-carts, and after having reached Jibta in the morning, had walked to the Mother's home, a distance of a mile and a half, with the help of a guide. All the children were very young and one was a suckling baby suffering from malaria. The devotee became perplexed in the new place under such circumstances, and extremely worried that he might be causing difficulties to the Mother. She, however, welcomed them with such love and care that they got over their hesitation in a trice, the wife of the devotee began to behave as freely as if she were in her father's house. With deft hands the Mother made all possible arrangements for them in her little home, and even the baby had its milk and a place to lie down in. At the time of bathing, the devotee's wife went to the tank with other women of the household and returned with a pitcher of water at her waist. The couple

were initiated by the Mother after the morning worship. The party had to go to Talit in the Burdwan district, a long way from Garbeta which it takes three nights to cover. So they started on their journey after their midday meal and a nominal rest at Jayrambati. At the time of departure they, as also the Mother, shed tears, and the Mother called on goddess Durga for their safety on the way; and then stood at the place looking out after them till they went out of sight. Then she went inside and sat on Nalini Devi's verandah, saying regretfully that, though her children had come from a distance facing all the troubles of the journey, they had to leave quickly without rest, or even a little hearty talk, or any good food. Just then somebody saw a bath towel left there by mistake. The Mother said with sorrow, 'It's so natural to forget! They couldn't stay even for a night, and didn't have a chat—does the mind want to go away like this? And so mistakes are inevitable.' Seeing the Mother sad, Brahmachari Gopesh suggested that as the devotees could not have gone far, he could catch them up and give them the towel by walking fast after them. He did so with the Mother's consent. But on returning he found a second problem had cropped up. A woman of the household had found a cloth-piece of the devotee's wife-drying in the sun on the tank behind. She brought it in and then went on cutting jokes at the expense of the forgetful wife. A childless woman joined in the joke saying, 'which one should she take care of—so many are her brood!' The Mother saw the cloth piece and heard the pungent remark; but she said with a heavy sigh, 'Dear me! My child will be missing her cloth tomorrow after bath; when she will be searching for it she will recollect, "I left it at the Mother's house."' Gopesh volunteered to go with the cloth once again, but Nalini Devi disapproved of the idea. The Mother, however, seemed pleased at the idea. So he walked up to Jibta, and caught up with the party just as the carts were starting.

There came a group of devotees from Mymensing, of whom the leader was an initiated disciple of the Mother.

As he was in indifferent health and knew that the party's long stay at Jayrampati would inconvenience the Mother, he decided to leave for home soon after visiting the Master's house at Kamarpukur. But as ill luck would have it, he fell ill at Jayarambati just after the Kamarpukur visit. The Mother's attendants concluded that they should send him by a palanquin to Koalpara to ensure better medical care and to free the Mother's house from an avoidable encumbrance. The Mother was informed after the plan had taken shape. She heard all this without a word, creating thereby the unmistakable impression that though she disliked the idea she would not stand in their way. She had recently recovered from an illness, and was under strict regimen. She was given the juice of one pomegranate every day; but as the after-effects of the First World War had made these fruits difficult to procure, they were brought from Calcutta and kept in the custody of the attendants; for it was the habit of the Mother to give away anything that lay at hand. Today she had the desire to give one of the fruits to the ailing disciple. The attendants' protests went in vain; the disciple had the pomegranate and along with it all the good wishes of the Mother.

The plan was to carry away the patient after the midday meal. But Swami Vidyananda came with a palanquin a little before evening. There appeared at this time a small patch of black cloud in the sky; still the party for Koalpara started with the patient. Not long after, a thunder squall broke out. The Mother had been taking rest after the day's occupations. But the storm raging outside and the rain pouring in torrents startled her. She rushed out to the verandah helter-skelter and said, 'Ah me! What will happen to my child!' The attendant persuaded her to re-enter the room. There, again, she went on praying piteously, 'Master, do save my son.' As the storm abated, her ferment, too, was somewhat assuaged. But as the squall shrieked again with redoubled fury, the Mother, too, made for the verandah and prayed

with a choked voice and tearful eyes, 'Prithee, Master, do be a little gracious, save my child.' The whole night passed in anxiety. Next day, when Vidyananda came to inform her that they had taken shelter in somebody's drawing room at Desra during the storm, so that they had no trouble whatsoever, then only was the Mother's heart composed.

Devotees came with diverse demands, and the Mother with her resourceful ministration and never-failing love, satisfied all these capricious children. Their childish whims were mostly in evidence at Jayrambati, where the Mother freed herself from all the unnatural restrictions of a cultured urban society, and the devotees found her more readily accessible than at the 'Udbodhan' where a strict vigilance was enforced. Many devotees, therefore, kept themselves informed of the Mother's movements and flocked to her village home when she happened to be there.

From the point of view of the Mother, there was a difference between Calcutta and Jayrambati. In Calcutta the monks and Golap-Ma and others had charge of household duties and of looking after the comforts of the devotees. Thus the Mother was not directly occupied with these duties. At Jayrambati on the contrary, everything rested on her. The devotees came to take *mantra* or see the Mother; but she had to keep a constant eye on all kinds of provision for their food, accommodation, conveniences, and necessities. This service of the devotees became something of a second nature with her. It might not have appeared as anything extraordinary; but we wonder how unassuming and diligent is the life of that unique personage who was none other than the Universal Mother, who was adored as such by thousands of devout people, and through whose mind and body was enkindled in the beginning of the twentieth century a mighty force which has addressed itself to the task of human regeneration and is calculated to be so occupied for ages. And how charming does that life become through a unique mixture of rural simplicity with unquestioning love! In the field of spirituality this is

altogether a rare phenomenon. Facts are indeed stranger than fiction.

The devotees came at odd hours, and that also without notice. Often enough they were strangers, though their dress and bearing revealed their culture and high social status. The villagers would look on them with amazement or hang on them with curiosity. But the Mother who was the centre of that mighty force that attracted all these high personages was oblivious of the commotion around her; and like the village girl that she was, she was ever engaged in various duties for them in and about her little cottage. Some of the new-comers were accustomed to taking tea soon after leaving bed, and so she would limp about with her rheumatic feet to get some milk from somebody's house whose cow may have been milked by then. Vegetables were not easy to procure in that hamlet. The little that she had collected from distant villages would sometimes run short because of the sudden influx of devotees. The Mother would go on searching from house to house for some more for immediate use. In the remote place nothing more could be had for refreshment than mere fried-rice and molasses. The Mother, therefore, would carefully stock semolina (soojee) with which she prepared *halva*. And after offering this prepartion in the morning to the Master together with some fruits, she would deal out the *prasada* in small cups for the breakfast of her children. Whenever her stock was exhausted she would hand over to them cupfuls of fried rice, cucumber, and molasses. The cultured devotee would protest, 'What's this stuff that you give me to eat, Mother; I amn't used to it.' The Mother would persuade him saying, 'Nothing else is available here, my son, this is all that can be had. Do eat this, it won't do you any harm. I shall feed you more nicely when I go go Calcutta.' The devotees from East Bengal were used to eating fish which, however, was difficult to obtain at Jayrambati. Still there would be no end to the Mother's effort. If she could not procure it, she would feel sad and say, 'I could not

feed my child well.' And though she was ever busy in this way, there was no disgust, rather she would say to her sisters-in-law with pride, 'Hullo, my dear, I have no trouble on account of my children. Even though a hundred of my children should come, I can tackle them all single-handed.'

Her motherliness defied all limitations of caste, country and community. Even during the days of the boycott of foreign goods (1905–11) when people's prejudices against the Britishers ran high, the Mother was heard to say, 'They too are my children, to be sure.' The authorities of the Kankurgachhi Yogodyana once invited her to visit the place during the Janmashtami celebration and she gladly agreed. But someone who had taken some umbrage against the people there, did not like the idea and told the Mother so. At this she said, 'It's your quarrel, my dear; but am I not their mother also?' A doctor's wife prayed after saluting the Mother, 'Mother, kindly bless me so that your son (my husband) may have a good practice.' The Mother gave her a straight look and said sternly, 'My dear daughter-in-law, to think that I should pronounce such a benediction,—that people should fall sick, that they should suffer! Well, dear, I can never do that. Let all be well, let the world prosper.' When saluting the Mother of the Universe after bathing, the Mother could be heard to pray, 'Dear Mother of the Universe, do grant happiness to the world.' The mad aunt was full of abuse for the Mother who, however, totally ignored her vagaries. But one day the aunt happened to say, 'Thou ruiner of all!' The Mother at once warned her, 'Whatever else you may call me, don't you call me ruiner of all. My children are spread all over the world; such a curse will be harmful to them.' We have come across many an incident illustrative of this all-comprehensiveness of her Motherliness so far as people of this country are concerned. Let us now turn to a few foreign devotees.

At Jayrambati, in 1906, she said to the young Brahmachari Girija, 'Mark you! The Master entered into spiritual

trance very often. One day, as he came down from a long *samadhi*, he said, "Listen, my dear, I went to a land where the people are all white. Ah! How sincere is their devotion!" Could I imagine then that these—Ole Bull[1] and others—would become devotees?' I was at a loss to think who these white persons could be.' It might have been incomprehensible to a girl brought up in an inaccessible village amidst rural simplicity and ignorance; but her all-comprehending motherliness, liberal outlook, and stately courtesy soon elevated her to a level where distances and colours were obliterated, yielding place to only an unquenchable affection.

Though a brahmin widow, she could mix freely with the foreigners, even to the extent of eating with them. Swami Vivekananda writes in his letter of March 1898, 'Shri Mother is here, and the European and American ladies went the other day to see her, and what do you think, Mother ate with them even there! Is not that grand?'

When Sister Nivedita returned from her Kashmir tour, she 'insisted on being the guest of women' so that she might become a part and parcel of Indian society, thereby becoming a fit instrument for the uplift of the country. This was no easy problem for Swami Vivekananda to solve. But the Holy Mother promptly came to his rescue. Nivedita was accepted as a daughter and accommodated in the Holy Mother's House in Calcutta.[2] Whenever Nivedita came to the Holy Mother, the Mother seated her by her side and there was no bar to the exchange of genuine feelings which create their own vehicles of communication. One day, when Nivedita came and sat by the Mother, the latter presented to her a woollen fan and said, 'I made this for you.' The gift delighted Nivedita so much that she sometimes touched it with her head, sometimes held it

1. She was a disciple of Swami Vivekananda and helped him in his work in various ways. She was very much attached to the Mother.

2. *The Master as I Saw Him*, VII Edn., p. 143.

to her bosom, and said, 'How fine, how charming!' Her happiness made the Mother say, 'Do you see how glad she is at getting that insignificant thing. Ah! How simple is her faith, as though a veritable goddess! How devoted she is to Naren (Vivekananda)! She has come here after giving up everything and is working here just because Naren was born here. What a devotion for the guru and what a fondness for this land!' Sister Nivedita presented to the Mother a nickel case, in which she kept the Master's hair, and she used to say, 'Nivedita said, "Mother, we were Hindus in our previous birth. We are born over there, so that the Master's message may spread."'

The Mother carefully preserved the gifts she got from her children and said, 'After all, what's a thing worth by itself; it's the memory that counts.' We refer to a much later incident. When Rammay (Gaurishwarananda) was taking out the clothes from the Mother's box for sunning them, he came across a fold—rotten wrapper of *endi* (Assam silk), and said, 'Mother, what's the need of keeping this one? It's all gone; let me throw it away. But the Mother said, 'No, my son; it was given me by Nivedita with great love; let it be there.' With these words she took the wrapper in hand, inserted black cumin seeds in its folds as a preservative, laid it by carefully and said, 'The very sight of the cloth reminds me of Nivedita. What a wonderful girl she was, my dear! At first she could not talk with me, and the boys acted as interpreters. Later on she picked up the Bengali language. She loved my mother very much.'

When Sister Christine visited the Mother with Sudhira Devi of the Nivedita School, a few days after Nivedita's demise the Mother remembered the intimate friendship that Christine had with Nivedita and said to Sudhira Devi 'Alas! They two lived together. Now it will be so sad for her to live alone!' And to Christine she said, 'Considering how even our hearts feel so intensely for her, yours will do so all the more, my dear. What a personality she was!

And how many are now weeping for her!' And the Mother began shedding tears. Then she made Christine tell her many things about the School.

From the conduct of Miss MacLeod[1] one evening we can get a glimpse of the kind of absorption the Mother's love could bring about. That day Swami Nirbhayananda had escorted her in a boat from the Belur Math to the 'Udbodhan.' When they returned, the evening service at the chapel was in progress. Miss MacLeod made her obeisance at the shrine, meditated for a while, and then started for her own quarters at the guest house of the Math. As it had become dark, Swami Dhirananda asked a Brahmachari to accompany her with a lantern. Miss MacLeod had already advanced a few steps ahead. When the Brahmachari drew near her, she was heard repeating to herself, 'I've seen her, I've seen her.' Suddenly she was aware of the Brahmachari's presence, and bringing her face to his ears she whispered with great emotion, 'The Holy Mother! I've seen her.' She covered a furlong in this mood of elation, hardly noticing where her footsteps fell or if her feet touched the ground at all; and every now and then she kept on uttering the word 'Mother' and making some soliloquy. In this connection we are put in mind of the high regard that Sister Nivedita had for the Mother. In a letter dated the 11th of December, 1911, written from Cambridge Mass., Nivedita acknowledges that when thinking of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Holy Mother's face flashes in her mind.

The Mother did not stop merely by showering her love on these foreign devotees; she sometimes picked up their customs wonderfully well. One summer afternoon in April 1920, when a European woman came to her, the Mother said, 'Come,' and stretched forth her hand in the

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1. A disciple of Swami Vivekananda who remained unmarried throughout her life and preached the Swami's message in and outside India through her saintly life and impressive talks. She and her sister Mrs. Leggett were called Jaya and Vijaya respectively by the great Swami.

European manner, caught hold of the woman's hand, and then kissed her in the Bengali fashion by touching her chin with the hand. The woman's daughter was ill, and so she came to seek the Mother's benediction. The Mother blessed her whole-heartedly, and then giving her some *bel* leaves and a lotus flower that had been offered to the Master she said, 'Touch your daughter's head with these.' The woman departed thanking her gratefully. The girl recovered; but the woman kept up her acquaintance with the Mother and took initiation from her in due course. The Mother loved her very much.

From Sister Nivedita we quote the following to illustrate the Mother's power to penetrate a new religious feeling or idea:

'I first realized this gift in the Holy Mother, on the occasion of a visit that she paid us in recent years, on the afternoon of a certain Easter-Day. Before that, probably, I had always been too much absorbed, when with her, in striving to learn what she represented, to think of observing her in the contrary position. On this particular occasion, however, after going over our whole house, the Mother and her party expressed a desire to rest in the chapel, and hear something of the meaning of the Christian festival. This was followed by Easter music, and singing, with our small French organ. And in the swiftness of her comprehension and the depth of her sympathy with these resurrection hymns, unimpeded by any foreignness or unfamiliarity in them, we saw revealed for the first time, one of the most impressive aspects of the great religious culture of Sarada Devi..The same trait came out again one evening, when in the midst of her little circle the Holy Mother asked *guru-bhagini* and myself, to describe to her a European wedding. With much fun and laughter, personating now the "Christian brahmin", and again the bride and bridegroom, we complied. But we were neither of us prepared for the effect of the marriage vow, "For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in

health—till death do us part," were words that drew exclamations of delight from all about us. But none appreciated them as did the Mother. Again and again she had them repeated to her. "Oh the *Dharmi* words! the righteous words!" she said. (*The Master as I saw Him*, pp. 149–50).

28

SPIRITUAL MINISTRATION

We have already spoken of how the Master revealed the Mother's identity with Saraswati, the goddess of learning, who had come down to impart wisdom. The wisdom that he spoke of had no worldly connotation, but it meant that flowering of the mind whereby it can have a life-transforming vision of Divinity. This awakening of a higher consciousness was one of the main functions of the Mother. But while we analyse this character and compose different chapters just because it suits our convenience to study a magnificent personality from different points of view, we must remember that it is an indivisible whole, which again draws its sustenance from and has its being in a more basic Entity. This ultimate Power defies all attempts at fragmentation; and so our limited intellect cannot grasp this Infinity. Still through our prismatic mind we try to understand Saradamani Devi as the mother, the guru, or the Deity. But a little thought will convince us that all these three aspects are inalienably blended in her finely integrated and harmonized life. Whenever she appears to us as the Mother, we get also a glimpse of her inherent power of imparting that true knowledge that dispels all ignorance; when we approach her as a guru, she draws us to her lap as a mother; and when we want to recognize the mother and guru in her, we find her seated transcendentally in her divine effulgence. In fact, we cannot discern where any of these mutually dependent aspects ends and another begins. And yet, we have to proceed along this ingenious path of analysis, for man cannot do otherwise. To us, then, she is the mother, full of unquestioning affection; Sarada, the bestower of the highest wisdom; and the Deity (Devi), full of purity, glory, and supernormal powers, and granting salvation to all. Of the early manifestation of the power of spiritual ministration and its evolution in her life, we have already got

a glimpse. In the present chapter we shall visualize its consummation.

The power of imparting wisdom that we meet with in the Mother is only one phase of the Divine grace that took human form for the good of all. If we approach this from the point of view of ordinary spiritual relationship, we shall merely be depriving ourselves of a fuller comprehension. The true guru is a saviour, who through his unbounded love accepts the entire responsibility of his disciple. Not only this; often enough he transfers to himself the disciple's sins and physical maladies and suffers vicariously. He does this consciously; and though he suffers in consequence, he does not give it up. Such instances are plentiful in the Mother's life; but we shall relate only a few for satisfying the curiosity of the readers. During her last illness at the 'Udbodhan', the Mother communicated her inner feelings to a devotee[1] thus, 'Do you think that even though the Master does not spare this body, I can have any respite till any of the souls whose responsibility I have accepted is left unredeemed? I shall have to be by their side. I have accepted the burden of all their merits and demerits. It is no fun to impart initiation. What a burden one has to take upon one's shoulders, and how much thought one has to bestow on them! See, for instance, when your father died, I too felt sad. I thought, "What a trial the Master has now thrust this boy into!" My anxiety is, how you can struggle out of it. That's why I talked with you so much. How can you understand all this? If you could understand everything, my burden would be less heavy. The Master is making diverse people play in diverse ways; and it is I who have to bear the brunt. I can't possibly leave those whom I have accepted as my own.'

This relationship between the guru and the disciple is not established by any formal process for this present span of life; it is an obligation voluntarily undertaken by the

1. He was then a Brahmachari, but left the Order after remaining in it for some years.

guru out of his compassion and lasts for all eternity. The Mother carried on a constant mental *japa*. In old age, when owing to physical weakness, she had to spend longer hours in her bed, the attendant noticed that she was doing *japa* even while in bed. At night her sleep was very light, so much so, that she responded to the first call. The attendant might ask in wonder, 'Are you not asleep, or don't you get sleep?' The Mother would reply, 'What can I do, my son? The boys come and entreat me eagerly. They take the *mantra* and go home. But nobody does any *japa* regularly. Some don't do it even once. Yet as I have shouldered the burden, should I not look after them? That's why I do *japa* and pray to the Master, "O Master, grant them enlightenment, grant them emancipation, and do you take on yourself their care in every way here and hereafter! This world is full of trials and tribulations. May they never have to come back again."'

Into a devotee's mind the Mother instilled these words of courage and assurance, 'What fear need you have, my son? Your thought comes to me well enough. You need not do anything; I am doing everything for you.' The devotee inquired, 'Do you have to work for all your sons wherever they may be?' The Mother replied, 'For all I have to work.' The devotee further asked, 'You have so many children; do you remember them all?' The Mother first admitted that she could not recollect all; and then she explained, 'I do *japa* for those whom I can recollect. And for those that I don't remember I pray to the Master thus, "Master, I have many sons in many places. Do you please look after those whose names I can't remember, and graciously grant that they may prosper."'

Out of a childish heedlessness, Swami Vishweshwaranand once suggested to the Mother that, since it was not possible for her to think personally of the welfare of each of her disciples, it was meet and proper to keep their number within practicable limits. The Mother met the accusation in her simple and guileless way by saying, 'As to

that, the Master did not forbid me. He explained so many things to me; would he not have forbidden this if he had felt the need? I entrust all the responsibility to the Master and to him I pray every day, "Do please look after every one of them, wherever they may be." And mind you, these *mantras* have all come from the Master—he gave them to me—and they are of proved efficacy.' In other words, the good of the disciples did not depend merely on their being remembered by the guru; the *mantra* had its own intrinsic power.

About the power of *mantra* and the taking over of sins, the Mother said to Brahmachari Rashbihari on another occasion (February 1913), 'Energy is transferred through a *mantra*—the guru's goes to the disciple and the disciple's comes to the guru. That's how sin is accepted through the imparting of *mantra* and the body gets so many diseases. It's a hard task to be a guru; one has to take over the disciples' sins. The guru has to take a share if a sin is committed by a disciple. If the disciple is good, the guru also is benefited.'

The Mother was at the Belur Math during the worship of Durga in 1916, when on the second day of the celebration many devotees saluted her by touching her feet. Subsequently Yogin-Ma saw the Mother washing her feet again and again with Ganges water, and she said, 'What are you at, Mother? You will catch cold as a result of this.' The Mother replied, 'How can I explain, Yogen? The body becomes soothed when some people touch my feet, while it is on fire as it were, when others do so, and I don't get relief unless I wash the feet with Ganges water.'

The Mother suffered, and she was aware of the cause of the suffering, and yet for the disciples' good she worked without wincing, though on rare occasions one could get an inkling of the real state of things from such casual remarks as this: 'My God! It's as though I am having all-day bouts of wrestling—the devotees come in a never-ending stream. It is too much for this body. As a result of my

prayer to the Master I have succeeded in keeping the mind constantly engaged here through thoughts of Radhu.' In reality, however, this was a passing mood in a mind that had willingly taken upon itself the task of universal welfare; and though such sentiments expressed her agonies, they never indicated bitterness. Once a devotee said, 'Mother, it's said that you have got rheumatism because of your acceptance of the devotees' sins. I have an earnest prayer to make—don't you suffer for my sake; ordain it so that I myself may suffer the consequences of my own work.' The Mother replied quickly, 'How can that be so, my boy, how can that be so? You keep well, and let me suffer.'

Although the Mother thus suffered for her disciples' sins, her outlook on sinners was one of pity rather than of hatred. A devotee was apprehensive that even after getting a mother like the Holy Mother he might not have his life's objective fulfilled. The Mother encouraged him saying, 'Why are you afraid, son? Know that the Master is ever behind you. And I am there. Don't fear so long as I am your Mother. For the Master has truly promised to me, "At the last moment I shall lead by the hand all those who will come to you." Whatsoever any one of you may do, and howsoever any one may behave, the Master will have to come at last to take you. The Lord has given (men) hands and feet (the senses); and sure enough, they will have their play.'

A woman of a respectable family, who had misbehaved through some evil impulse, became penitent and was led by good luck to the Holy Mother. She stood trembling with a sense of her guilt at the doorway and said, 'Mother, what will be my lot? I am not fit to draw nearer to you in this holy chapel.' The Mother stepped forward and throwing her holy arms round the woman's neck, said, 'Come, my daughter, come in. You have realized what sin is, and you are repentant. Come, I shall initiate you. Lay everything at the Master's feet; and cast away all fear.' The Mother

herself explained one day the cause of this unstinted love, 'Why, my dear, did the Master come only to enjoy *rasagollas?*'

In association with her vicarious suffering for the sins of others was to be found an unquenchable desire for doing good. If she had no new devotee at her place at Jayrambati, she would often be heard to say, 'There's no devotee today.' When Swami Gaurishananda was at Jayrambati, the Mother's rheumatism had worsened, making it difficult for her to move about freely. But even in that state the Swami heard her say one day to the Master, 'This day, too, is going in vain! No one has turned up today! Did you not say, "You will have to do some thing or other every day?"' She kept on looking out to see if anyone was coming, saying to the Master with fixed eyes, 'How is it, Master? Will the day go in vain?' The Mother's face brightened up when three devotees came the next day.

She used to say, 'I impart *mantra* out of pity. They become importunate, they weep, their sight fills me with mercy. Out of compassion I grant initiation. Else what do I gain? One has to take over sins by giving initiation. I think thus, "The body will go anyhow: still let them have something."' A devotee one day (January 1912) communicated to the Mother a dream in which a certain man was begging her for initiation and she was refusing him saying, 'If I do anything to this man just now, then I shall not live, — my body will fall away.' The dreamer also forbade the Mother; still she did something to the man by touching his chest and neck while repeating those words of apprehension. Hearing of the dream the Mother said, 'I become so disgusted at times by the supplication of some people that I think, "This body will certainly fall off; so let it go even now; let me give him *mantra*."' At Banaras, the Mother said on another occasion (November 1912), 'I don't remember to have done any sin from my birth. I touched him (Sri Ramakrishna) when I was five years old. Even granting that my wisdom had not deve-

loped then, there's no denying the fact that he touched me. Why should I then have such ordeals? Others are becoming free by virtue of their having touched him; and is my delusion alone so exceptionally great? My mind that tries to soar high day and night, I keep down through compassion for these people.' At the Koalpara Ashrama, a devotee advised the Mother, 'Since the touch of your devotees makes you suffer, it is better to avoid it.' But the Mother replied, 'No, my son, it's for this that we came. If we don't take over the sins and sufferings, and don't digest them, who else will? Who else will bear the burden of the sinners?' She said, however, 'A pure man's touch brings joy.' But we are at present pursuing a different topic; now we are discussing the unquestioning love of the ever graceful Mother.

One morning three devotees came to Jayrambati with a letter of introduction from Swami Brahmananda. The Mother heard the letter read out and called in the devotees; but she sat with her legs folded, though it was usual for her, because of her rheumatism, to keep them stretched out even in the presence of devotees. After the devotees had saluted her, she was heard saying, 'So, at last Rakhal has sent me these!' She refused to initiate them and directed them to go to the Belur Math. The devotees obeyed her for the time being and went to the outer apartment. But their disappointment was too great to be easily assuaged; and hence they approached her for the second time to be more propitious. She, however, was inflexible and spoke to the Master thus, 'Master, I prayed to you yesterday that the day might not pass uselessly. And at long last you too bring these!' Inexorability was, however, against her grain; and she yielded at last saying, 'Master, let me carry on your work so long as the body lasts.' The initiation was duly finished. A few days later Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda, Shivananda, and Saradananda heard the whole incident sitting on the upper verandah of the Belur Math on the Ganges side. The

narration over, Swami Brahmananda sat without a word for a pretty long time. Swami Premananda heaved a long sigh and said with folded hands, 'Mercy, mercy! It's by this glorious compassion that the Mother is protecting us for ever. We can't express in words the poison that she has accepted. If we had done so, we would have been burnt down to ashes.'

Swayed by compassion, the Mother could not sometimes take care of her own health. Once when she had become very feeble owing to continuous suffering from malaria, and by Swami Saradananda's instruction interviews etc., had been suspended, there came a visitor from Barisal. Then ensued a discussion among the attendants as to whether he should be allowed to see the Mother. She, however, heard something of the talk that was going on and, coming to the door of the house, told Swami Parameshwarananda, 'Why do you prevent his coming?' The Swami replied, 'Swami Saradananda has ordered us to do so.' At this she said firmly, 'What has Sarat to say? That's why we have come. I shall initiate him.' And in truth she did initiate him the next day.

A devotee, however weak he might be, would have an accession of strength, courage and faith, if he could but come to the Mother. A devotee could not have peace of mind although he made *japa*. The Mother told him encouragingly that the mind would be pacified by practice. But this could hardly comfort him. He had heard that if a disciple failed to make *japa*, it harmed the guru; hence he wanted to return the *mantra* to the Mother. At this she said, 'Now see, how he talks! I lose my sleep in thought of you all; and the Master has blessed you long ago.' Tears rolled down her cheeks as she spoke; and with emotions she continued, 'Well, you need not make any *japa* of the *mantra* any more.' The devotee returned to his senses now, and in consternation he ejaculated, 'Mother, so you snatch away everything I had! What am I to do now? Am I, then, O Mother, condemned to hell?'

The Mother at once uttered these heartening words, 'What! You, who are my son, will be damned! Whoever has come here, whoever is my son is already redeemed. Destiny dare not throw my children into hell. Free yourself from all anxiety by entrusting your future to me. And remember this always, that there's one behind you who will come to you at the right moment and leads you to the everlasting domain.' In a similar position she cheered up another drooping spirit with the words, 'Whatever may be the position now (i.e., even though *japa* and meditation may not be very regular), the Master will have to come at last (to take you). He himself promised this; can his own words be meaningless? Do as it pleases you.'

On receiving a despondent letter at Jayrambati from a Sannyasin disciple in 1916, she said, 'How is that, my dear! Is the Master's name such an empty word as to go in vain? That name can never fail. Those who have come here with their minds fixed on the Master, will have the vision of their chosen Deity as a dead certainty. If they don't get this at any other time, they can't but have it at the time of death.'

In the foregoing assurance the Mother has drawn pointed attention to the need of strengthening one's faith for the chosen Deity or for both the guru and the chosen Deity. In the two illustrations we adduce, now, faith and reverence for the guru are more prominently emphasized. Sri Mahendranath Gupta, on his arrival at Jayrambati in 1915, imagined that any meditation or *japa* undertaken at the holy village of the Mother's nativity would lead to greater results. Therefore he overdid these a little one day. When he went to salute the Mother that day, she said, 'Now that you are with your mother, what's the need of so much *japa* and meditation? I, indeed, am doing everything for you. Now eat and live merrily, free from all care.'

In 1907, Swami Girijananda, then a Brahmachari, was told by the Mother at Jayrambati, 'My boy, it's not

proper to make any *japa* in the guru's house.' And yet a little earlier he had been told by her, 'The repetition of the *mantra* for at least one hundred and eight times in accordance with the guru's direction must be done by you every day without fail. Then, again, you are holy men; you will have to do *japa* always.' Finding the two instructions rather contradictory, Girijananda asked, 'Should I then forgo the repetition of the *mantra* even for one hundred and eight times?' 'You will repeat one hundred and eight times as instructed by the guru', corrected the Mother at once, 'but nothing more.'

In these invaluable talks one gets on the one hand examples of the promise of redemption coupled with generation of faith, and on the other hand indication of acceptance of the responsibility of the disciple and a fervent appeal for cultivating love for the guru and God. In this connection we recall — first, that the Master asked Girishchandra Ghosh to give up all formal practices and to execute a power of attorney, as it were, in favour of the Master to do everything in his stead; and secondly, that Jesus Christ indicated that as a marriage party spends the time in merriment in the bridegroom's company, so also if Christ's disciples cultivated real love for him rather than punctiliousness for formalities, they would be nearer Heaven. In the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (VI.23), love for the guru and god has been eulogized as an absolute necessity. In fact, how can one meditate upon another if one has no love for the entity concerned? And how can one have any faith in any wisdom, if one has it not for the teacher? Therefore it was that the Mother shouldered her children's responsibility, and loved them fondly, and in return expected them to love her equally and to accept her as the one guiding star of their lives.

But the above discussion should not make any reader jump to the conclusion that the Mother decried *japa* or meditation, or for the matter of that, any formal practice as such. If that were so, why did she initiate hundreds of

her disciples, and why did she train them in spiritual practices? In fact, the above examples are extraordinary, and they underline something more fundamental than meets the eye. We introduced them simply because uncommon examples more easily bring into prominence the essential qualities of a rare personality. But if we confine our vision merely to these events, we shall have at best a partial view of the character we are studying. She came for the generality of people and spent her life among them. Hence to understand her fully we must descend to this level of common man. We shall find her that for ordinary men she chose an integrated formal path of faith and devotion, into which she breathed a new life; and she made easy and enjoyable a strict spiritual discipline that was otherwise hard and horrifying.

After initiation, Sri Nareshchandra Chakravarty asked her, 'Mother, shall I have to become a vegetarian now?' The Mother replied, 'What a question! Why should you be a vegetarian? Why should my boys be vegetarians? You should eat plentifully and live cheerfully.' But when he asked again, 'Suppose I can't do *japa* of the *mantra* of my chosen Deity', the Mother said with a firm voice, 'What do you mean? You won't do *japa* of your *mantra*? What a suggestion! If you don't do the *japa*, you lose; that affects me not in the least!'

To a devotee the Mother said, 'How can one do without *japa*, and meditation? These have got to be done.' When the devotee complained that the impurities of his mind were not being removed in spite of these, she said, 'Through the practice of *japa* they well go. How can one afford to do without these practices?' Another devotee asked the Mother (1907) about initiation, 'Well, Mother, what's the need of taking a *mantra*? If instead of doing *japa* of a particular *mantra*, one simply goes on repeating "Mother Kali", "Mother Kali", (for instance), will that not be sufficient?' The Mother replied, 'The *mantra* purifies the body. A man becomes holy by doing *japa* of the

Lord's *mantra*... The *mantra* is necessary for purification of the body, if not for anything else.' On another occasion (February 1913), a disciple showed her a tiny seed of the huge banyan tree and said, 'Do you see, Mother, how small it is — tinier even than the tiniest seed we know, and yet what a huge tree sprouts from it!' The Mother said, 'Why should it not be so? Consider, for instance, how small the seed of the Lord's name is; and yet from this sprout in time divine moods, devotion and love.'

A disciple who had developed mental aberration, returned his rosary to the Mother. When a monk asked her whether he had returned the *mantra* also, she replied, 'Can that ever be? It's a living *mantra*. Can there be any giving back of it — the *mantra* that one has once received, the great *mantra* that it is? If one has but once a love for his guru, can he ever be despoiled of it?'

About the efficacy of *japa* the Mother once said, 'By *japa* and austerity is cut asunder the bondage of *Karma* (past action). But God can't be realized except through love and devotion. As for *japa* and such other things, do you know what they stand for? Through them the senses etc., become subdued.' On another day she said, 'One should perform *japa*, meditation, etc., at regular hours giving no room for laziness.' At other times she declared, 'If one can repeat the *mantra* fifteen to twenty thousand times every day, then it will show results. Let him do so first, if he does not get success, let him come and say so. But one has to practise a little attentively. Doing nothing and neglecting everything, they merely complain, "Why does not my *japa* bear fruit?", 'Work you have to do as a matter of course; work keeps the mind well. But *japa*, meditation, and prayer are specially needed; one should sit up at least in the morning and in the evening. That is like the helm of a boat. When one sits up for a while in the evening, there comes to one's mind for consideration what one has done throughout the day. Then one has to compare the

state of mind one has today with what one had yesterday. Then one should meditate on one's chosen Deity as one goes on doing *japa*. How can you know how you are conducting yourself unless you have *japa* and meditation every morning and evening side by side with work?' 'It's very necessary to have a fixed time for *japa* and meditation.' Again, she instructed certain advanced souls to have a constant rememberence of God. At the time of returning home (April 1919) after initiation at Koalpara, a certain devotee asked her, 'Mother, what's the secret?' She pointed to a small timepiece in a niche, and said, 'As that timepiece is ticking, so also go on repeating God's name, that will bring you everything; nothing more need be done.'

In fact, *japa* occupied a very high place in her estimation. When instructing a gifted man about the path of knowledge, she might say now and then, 'That *japa* or muttering is meant for women; you have your knowledge;' but if we extend our search beyond such unusual utterances, we shall find her emphasizing the importance of *japa* again and again, and herself doing *japa* for the good of her disciples. Nevertheless, from a higher standpoint she unequivocally decried *japa* as a mere mechanical process when she said, 'These *mantras* and the like are nothing, my daughter; devotion is all. In the Master you will find your guru and chosen Deity. He is all.' And drawing attention to divine grace she said, 'You talk of having done so much of *japa*, or so much of work; but nothing will avail. Who can achieve anything unless Mahamaya opens the way. O creatures, surrender yourselves, just surrender yourselves. Then only will She be gracious and clear the way for you.' To another devotee she said, 'Through *japa* and austerity the bondage of *Karma* is cut asunder, but God cannot be realized unless through love and devotion. Did the cowherds get Krishna by *japa* and meditation or by talking to him chummily as "Come here, dear", "Take this, dear", "Eat this, dear"?'

Till one attains this attitude of surrender and this passionate love, no spiritual practice is to be neglected; any one aspiring to salvation must have recourse to one of these practices. A consideration of the Mother's instruction about the various disciplines will impress this fact on us. Sri Shyamacharan Chakravarty of Rangoon began practising the control of breath for about three hours a day in accordance with what he had read in the *Raja-yoga* of Swami Vivekananda. As a result, he began to have a buzzing sound in his ears of which he could not be cured, so that he had to take leave from his office. On his visit to the Belur Math during this leave, he came to know of the Holy Mother and proceeded to Jayrambati. As soon as he set foot in the village, his ailment left him. Afterwards when he apprised the Mother of his intention to practise *yoga*, she replied, 'What energy have you stored up in your body, my boy, and what have you in your mind that you want to practise *yoga*?' 'Have I no way out, then?' asked the eager devotee. 'I shall tell you whatever is to be done,' assured the Mother. After initiation she instructed him to do *japa* twice daily. Shyamacharan wanted to do it thrice and wished to know if anything more need be done. The Mother repeated her instruction about doing *japa* twice daily and concluded, 'That's enough for all you want.' 'What shall I do when on a journey?' inquired the disciple. 'It will be enough if you think mentally,' replied the Mother.

A monastic disciple asked her in Banaras (January 1913), 'I have been practising the control of breath a little; should I continue it?' The Mother replied, 'You may do it just a little; it's no good heating the brain by too much practice of it. And if the mind settles down of its own accord, what more need is there of the control of breath?' This monk told the Mother again (June 1919) at Koalpara, 'I have been practising *asanas* (postures) for some time for the sake of health. These postures help digestion and strengthen the vow of celibacy.' The Mother's

instruction was, 'You may practise after taking into consideration both sides of the question, namely, that the mind may become too much body-conscious, and the total giving up may ruin health.' This was her opinion about postures as resorted to for the sake of health. As for a suitable posture as a help to a long course of *japa*, she said, 'Practise some sort of sitting posture which will help you to sit for two or three hours. When you feel as if pins and needless are pricking your leg, you may change your position. In course of time you will have no discomfort.' She also urged on her disciples the need for such practices as worship. When the above devotee said in connection with the God Vishwanatha of Banaras, 'Mother, we have no longer any liking for a stone image of Siva', the Mother said with surprise, 'How is that so, my boy? What a number of great sinners are coming to Banaras and getting redemption by touching Vishwanatha! He is taking over everybody's sin without demur.' She also encouraged many to read the scriptural texts regularly, as for instance, some three or four verses from the *Gita* every day.

And yet it is true that she constantly warned the sentimental devotees against forgetting the ideals and sticking to rituals alone as the be-all and end-all of life. In a letter to Sri Rajendrakumar Datta (11-11-'16), she wrote, 'What need I tell you about your proposal to wear the sacred thread?[1] This is no bad thing, though a social institution. With regard to these matters you should do as you think best. If you take up the sacred thread, see to it that it is adequately utilized. Do not adopt anything as a mere fad. You may do *japa* of any *mantra* you like after finishing first the *japa* of your chosen *mantra*. True it is that there is no hard and fast rule about the time of *japa*, yet morning and evening are the favourable periods.

1. Refers to a movement for the wearing of the sacred thread by certain classes of non-brahmins who assert themselves as really belonging to the twice-born castes—Kshatriyas and Vaishyas—though their forefathers discarded the thread for some reason.

Whatever the time be, you must do *japa* every day; it is not good to forgo it any day.' Once on seeing some one worshipping Siva, a woman devotee felt a hankering to do likewise. When she came to the Mother for instruction and approval, the latter said, 'All worship — of Kali, Durga, and others — can be performed with the *mantra* that I have imparted. But if anyone so desires, one can learn other *mantras* also for those purposes. You have no need of all that.' When the question arose regarding the offering of food to the Master in accordance with scriptural formalities, the Mother said, 'There's no great need of scriptural forms. Everything can be done with the *mantra* of the chosen Deity.'

From an examination of the times and places of initiation, as also of the persons receiving it, we are forced to the conclusion, that as the Mother had her eyes riveted on the one goal of life, viz., the realization of God, she could not possibly allow mere outward circumstances to interfere with her inner conviction. Any good means, be that enjoined by the scriptures, or adopted for the time being out of a sincere eagerness for excellence, that appeared to her as subservient to the main objective, she adopted without hesitation, and drew the disciples' attention to it. This view is substantiated by her directions to her disciples with regard to the social and religious customs of everyday life.

Orthodoxy requires that the morning prayer and meditation should be done before eating. But Sri Shauryendra Mazumdar could not sit for his *japa* or meditation until he had his morning tea. Hence after initiation he told the Mother of this difficulty and wanted direction. The Mother told him, 'My son, can a mother ever be stepmotherly? You may, if you like, first eat and then begin *japa* and meditation.' Nalin Babu who had not finished his period of mourning, consequent on the death of his mother, hesitated to eat some cakes offered to him by the Holy Mother and asked for her advice, whereupon she said

'What's the harm in that, my son? I too am your mother. I offer it, and there's no transgression here.' As for food, she advised Shyamachran Chakravarty, 'My son you can eat fish, meat, indeed anything you like. But the Master forbade eating the food connected with the first funeral obsequies following any death, or pertaining to a purificatory ceremony (after the main wedding).'

A woman devotee asked the Mother, if it was permissible for a woman to perform worship if she happened to be suffering under any temporary social disability. The Mother referred her to what the Master had said to herself under similar circumstances and then added, 'Yes, my daughter, it is permissible if one has the requisite devotion for the Master..you can worship; but if you feel any compunction, then don't do it.' But when another woman raised the same question on another day, the Mother said, 'How can one do any work for gods and goddesses when in such a state? Well, you don't do it.'

Without ignoring settled norms, but rather giving an enlightened allegiance to them, the Mother wanted to draw the devotees to the path of fervent love. Her process of initiation, followed this middle course. In refusing initiation to a candidate she said, 'You have your ancestral guru; you can as well have it from him.' Again, there are instances where she kept intact the *mantra* of the family guru and adding to it a new one instructed the disciple to repeat first the former *mantra* ten times and then repeat the new one. Such variations accorded with the dispositions of the candidates as also the Mother's own natural mood. About this double initiation Sri Kumudbandhu Sen one day heard the Mother speak thus at the Sarkarbari Lane house: 'Sometimes people of little faith and of unsteady mind come for initiation. I mentally read their past history from their very appearance and behaviour and ask them whether they were previously initiated by someone else. When they

reply in the affirmative, I tell them, "Strange You have come again for initiation! You have no faith in the *mantra* already given by your guru. What is a *mantra* but the holy name of God. Why have you come for initiation again?" Then they beg to be forgiven and again implore me with tears in their eyes. I can't bear anybody's tears. I pray to the Master for strengthening their faith, and through his direction I give them initiation in addition to the *mantra* already received by them. This additional *mantra* is given for fresh stimulus and strength in order to increase their faith in the name of God.' (*Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1952, p. 261).

She made a distinction between the teacher who initiates and the teacher who instructs. About this she wrote to a devotee (January 1911) that one might have an instructing teacher for technical *yoga* processes etc., but the initiating teacher must not be changed. When the letter of an applicant for initiation was read out to her (March 1914), she remarked, 'The purpose of initiation is to try to realize God through sincere spiritual effort; it's not meant for stopping the allowances of the family guru. I can agree to initiate this boy on condition that he will revere his family guru as much as he will do me and that he will agree to increase the guru's monthly allowances according to his resources.' The applicant agreed to these conditions and he was initiated. About the initiating teacher, the Mother had very liberal views. On being told that a man who had not much of spirituality was giving *mantras* to others, she said, 'These holy men have something of professionalism. But mind you, even this is efficacious. Men will not do anything of their own accord; but the instruction of these people will induce them to call on God a little.' Yet, in spite of such generous feelings, she was not to be silenced by mere unreasonable demands or assertion of prescriptive rights. To Sri Taraknath Roy she wrote in a letter (March 1913), 'Pay to the family guru his annual allowance, and something

more also if you can afford; but where can you get the wherewithal to satisfy him with money?' When a woman devotee wrote that she had been cursed by her family guru on being informed of her having been initiated by the Mother, the Mother had it written in reply, 'Not even a brahmin's curse touches one who takes refuge in the Master. You need have no fear.'

One must have real craving for initiation. Granted that hankering, a way can be found out despite a thousand obstacles. A woman wrote to the Mother that she could not have her initiation because of the opposition of her husband's parents. The Mother intimated to her that God was omnipresent, and that He would respond to all people's calls. Another poor boy came to the 'Udbodhan', but went away disappointed without meeting the Mother because she was ill then. So he wanted to ascertain by means of a letter if he would be more fortunate when he turned up next time. The Mother remarked, 'The point is this: anyone whose time is ripe for getting beyond the world, will come away tearing off all bonds, nobody can keep him back even with fetters. Want of money, waiting for a reply, fear of returning disappointed — all these are meaningless.' The Mother permitted him to come. Before married women were initiated, the Mother made sure that they had their husbands' consent. If such concurrence was forthcoming she initiated the wife even though the husband might not be a disciple.

Those who came for initiation to her were seldom rejected unless it was physically impossible for her. If it was a pure soul, she gave the *mantra* even without being asked for, or she did so on the very first approach. Vaikuntha Babu of Cuttack met the Mother at Kothar. He had no idea of taking initiation at the time and therefore returned home after bowing down to her. But a strong attraction brought him back to Kothar in some four days. When he went to pay his respects to the Mother on the eve of his return this time, she said, 'Well,

stay here for the morrow and go the day after.' Later he was told that the Mother would bless him, and so he must get ready on the morrow. He understood nothing of this; still at the Mother's call he appeared before her the next day. She asked him, 'Will you take *mantra*?' Vaikuntha answered, 'Kindly give, if it so pleases you. I know nothing.' Then the Mother again inquired, 'Of which deity will you have the *mantra*?' Vaikuntha found no answer, for he had not thought over the matter. The Mother, therefore, chose the *mantra* for him.

The Mother was once staying in Calcutta recovering from a prolonged illness at Jayrambati, which had heavily told on her health. All interviews were, therefore, stopped. At that time there came a Parsi youth to meet her. He had read some of Swami Vivekananda's books and felt drawn towards Vedanta. Being impressed by him, Swami Saradananda allowed him to go upstairs to the Mother's presence. Once there, he implored, 'Revered Mother, give me some great *mantra* through which I may realize the Lord.' At this the Mother turned to Brahmachari Rashbihari and said, 'Shall I give? Yes, let me do so.' Rashbihari intervened, 'How can that he so! You have just recovered from illness, nobody is allowed even to see you! What will Sarat Maharaj think when he hears of this! Not now, it can be in future.' The Mother said, 'Very well, go and consult Sarat.' When the Brahmachari returned with Swami Saradananda's unquestioning consent, he found the Mother waiting ready with Ganges water and two small carpets spread for herself and the Parsi youth. After the initiation she said, 'He's a fine boy; he understood what I said well enough.'

In fact, the Mother imparted initiation because of a felt inspiration. She used to say, 'The Master is sending these (candidates),' or 'No, no; I am nobody. It's the Master who graciously blesses them. I am only his instrument.' During such initiation, difference of languages created no real difficulty. She spoke in Bengali, but the

disciples understood her. When she was in the South, the local people came and begged, 'Mantra, please!' 'Instruction, please!' There also she knew that to be the apt *mantra* for a particular candidate which welled up from her heart spontaneously. She used to say, 'As soon as I am about to impart a *mantra* to some people, there arises in the mind such a thought as "Give this", "Give this", whereas in other cases, it appears as though I know nothing, nothing comes to my mind. I keep on sitting. Then after a long cogitation I can visualize the *mantra*. In the case of a good aspirant the *mantra* springs up from the mind instantaneously.'

At times the Mother initiated small boys. A boy of twelve years began to cry after saluting her at the 'Udbodhan' saying, 'I want the Mother's grace.' Everybody threw cold water on such sentimentalism, considering it nothing more than a childish whim or imitation. Next day an attendant of the Mother saw the boy sitting on the veranda outside the building. Such a sight was nothing unusual. Therefore he went to the market without heeding him. But while returning, he became curious to see the boy departing with a smiling face, and on asking him the reason for this, he was intrigued to learn that the boy had been initiated. Returning to the 'Udbodhan', he learnt about the whole incident. The Mother had sent Radhu downstairs saying, 'You will find a boy sitting below the porch; bring him up.' And thus she had given him the *mantra*; and now the boy was on his way to the market to get some fruits and sweets to be offered to the Mother as *guru-dakshina*[1]. The attendant asked her, 'Mother, how strange it is that you have initiated such a small urchin? What does he understand?' The Mother replied, 'Howsoever that may be, my son, he is a boy; and yesterday he cried so much holding on to my feet! Tell me, whoever weeps for God? How many have such strong inclination?'

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1. Offering in kind or cash to be given to the guru after one's initiation.

Two or three days before the Janmashtami that followed the Mother's return from Rameswaram, a young Brahmachari of Koalpara wanted to take *mantra* from her. He was then thirteen years old and was a favourite of the Mother. But the proposal evoked great opposition from Golap-Ma, who said, 'Strange that such a small boy, who will forget the *mantra* in a couple of days, should want initiation even now! The Mother hails from your parts. Take the *mantra* later, after due consideration of everything, when she goes that side.' So saying she left the place. The Mother, however, said, 'See, how Golap talks! Does any one forget what one learns as a boy? Let him do whatever he can even from this time. And then I am there, to be sure.' The initiation took place on the Janmashtami day. Finding the boy making his *japa* exactly as the Mother had shown, she said, 'There you are! Why should not this little thing stick to his mind? It certainly will. In future when the need arises, I shall show you everything over again.' The initiation over, the Mother gave him two sweets to eat, which had earlier been offered to the Master, and said, 'Don't be shy; one should partake of some *prasada* after the initiation.'

And yet, this was not the general custom. One day when somebody raised the question of the initiation of a boy of some seven or eight years of age, the Mother said, 'He is too young still; how can there be any initiation now? The boy is a devotee. Let him have long life, let him be a servant of the devotees.'

We have said that if the candidate was a desirable person, and if the Mother felt the inspiration, she did not take time and circumstances much into consideration. A devotee from Shillong resolved within himself that he would not go to the Mother unless he saw her seven times in dreams which would establish for him her divinity. Having been blessed with the seven visions through the Mother's grace, he went to Jayrambati to see her. When he was about to take leave of her, she said, 'It is best to

have your initiation before you go.' The devotee suggested that it might as well take place in Calcutta. But the Mother said, 'No, my son, let this thing be finished; it can be done even today.' The devotee reminded her, 'But I have partaken of *prasada*.' The Mother did not consider that any bar to the initiation and imparted the *mantra*. In truth, the grace of a true guru cannot be delimited by conditions.

One evening, a boy who had just been released from police vigilance, came to Koalpara to seek initiation. The Mother took a natural pity on him and agreed to bless him the next day. But since the Koalpara Ashrama was then in the bad books of the police, and the harbouring of an erstwhile suspect would give them another excuse for harassing the inmates, he was lodged in a house outside. Early next morning as the Mother was going from her own residence, the Jagadamba-Ashrama, to Radhu's house, the boy met her in the open field after his morning bath. Being ordered by the Mother, the Brahmachari brought for her a glass of water. Then it seemed as though she was searching for something to sit on. Hence the Brahmachari inquired, 'Shall I bring carpets for you?' 'Never mind,' said the Mother. 'You need not go again; get some straw, and let us both sit down.' Thus seated the Mother washed her lips ceremonially and gave him the *mantra*.

The Mother was waiting on the railway platform at Vishnupur for her train to Calcutta when an up-country porter discovered her and hurrying to her side fervently, 'You are my mother Sita; what a long time I have been searching for you! Where had you been so long?' And he began weeping. The Mother took mercy on him, consoled him, and asked him to bring a flower. The man offered that flower at her feet, and she gave him the *mantra*.

Under the eaves of her house at Jayarambati the Mother stood one day accepting the salutations of her sons. Last of all came one who held her feet and wept profusely without explaining why he did so. The Mother understood his

tearful prayer and signalling all to move away, gave him initiation, even while standing where she was.

From Ranchi there arrived a boy along with others to witness the Jagad-dhatri worship at the Mother's place at Jayrambati. But owing to the busy programme of the days of celebration, he found no opportunity to beg for initiation, nor did anybody else create any scope for him to do so, since he was considered to be too young for the purpose. When the day of bidding farewell came, the Mother was in indifferent health and remained indoors. The Ranchi boy, along with other devotees, went to the verandah of the room and waited there for his turn to go in and prostrate himself before her. When all had finished, he stepped in and began weeping so bitterly with his head on the Mother's feet that they became wet. The Mother lifted him up and asked, 'Why do you weep my son? What do you want? Will you take *mantra*?' The boy nodded. The Mother then closed the door and initiated him then and there.

The Mother had a girl-friend of her childhood days in the village. As they lay side by side one day, the Mother imparted the *mantra* to this friend.

Though it was true that under special circumstances the Mother forgot time or places, it is not to be inferred that such was the normal procedure. Usually she abided by tradition. For instance, she did not give initiation at Banaras, saying, 'Siva is the guru here.' She was not ordinarily willing to initiate anyone on the birthday of the Master, though she made exceptions to this rule. For instance, she initiated two persons on that day during her stay in Madras. On another occasion a sickly young man came to Jayrambati to be initiated on that day. He had not birth or wealth to back up his prayer. But the Mother looked into one's heart rather than at one's appearance; and when the man pleaded that unless he was initiated on that very day, he would consider himself extremely unfortunate inasmuch as he would not be able to come

again in his whole life, the Mother became gracious and although earlier she had intimated her unwillingness, and the attendant too now pleaded against her waiving her rule, she initiated the man that very day.

There are many examples to prove that the Mother selected the *mantras* in accordance with the mental make-up of the candidates. A young woman married to a cultured family went to her husband's house soon after initiation. There she meditated and did *japa* regularly; but she was ever in doubt as to whether the *mantra* was being properly pronounced. When she met the Mother after three years, she wanted to get the doubt resolved. Hearing of the difficulty, the Mother said, 'Well, my dear, that happended long ago. Can I have it in mind even now? Anyway you don't say anything, but wait a little; let me ask of the Master.' With these words, she entered the shrine, and coming out after a while said, 'Well, my daughter, did I give you this *mantra*?' The disciple admitted that she did. 'Then you repeat it,' said the Mother, 'there's no error in it.'

When Sri Rasiklal Roy approached the Mother for initiation, she wanted to ascertain from him his hereditary *mantra*. Rasiklal did not know this. The Mother kept quiet for a moment and then spoke, 'This is your family *mantra*,' and initiated him with it. On inquiry afterwards, it was proved that the Mother had not made any mistake.

When Sri Shashibhushan Mukherji of Bagda prayed for initiation in the *mantra* of the Sakti cult, the Mother corrected him by saying, 'My son, I see Rama in you. Do the people of your family do *japa* of Rama's *mantra*? Rama and Sakti are identical, to be sure. Then why should there be any hesitation in accepting the Rama *mantra*?' In fact, the whole family was devoted to Sri Ramachandra.

Though most often, family traditions and personal predilections coincided, in certain cases people ignored the

tutelary deities and chose other Gods; and in still others, family tradition differed from individual disposition. In such circumstances the Mother relied on her mind that was crystal clear, and as such correctly reflected for her the requisite *mantra*. Though the ancestors of Sri Saradakinkar Roy were worshippers of Sakti, he came under Vaishnava influence. Hence when he got a Sakti *mantra* from the Mother, he became a little perplexed. The Mother understood this and assured him that very afternoon out of her own accord, 'I have given you the right thing.'

In some cases the Mother asked the candidates about their preferences before the *mantras* were selected. If the candidates' choice tallied with her own, she used those *mantras*; otherwise her own vision got the pride of place. Sri Surendramohan Mukherji, when asked by the Mother, said that he had an attraction for Kali as seated on the lap of Siva. The Mother asserted, 'Can Sakti (Kali) ever exist without Siva, my son? Yours is the Sakti *mantra*.' After receiving initiation in that *mantra*, Surendramohan felt as though an electric current darted through his frame which began to quiver, so that he had no longer any doubt regarding the appropriateness of the *mantra*.

From Sri Karnatkumar Chaudhury we heard a charming anecdote which confirms much of what we have written so far. He had taken a *mantra* from another guru, but found no peace of mind. While in such a predicament he went to make obeisance to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan' in 1914 before he started for an assemblage of Vaishnavas at Vrindaban. The Mother was then seated for worship in the shrine. As Karnatkumar saluted her from outside, she motioned him to enter the room and salute her by touching her feet. This done, the Mother blessed him saying, 'Govinda (Krishna) will bless you.' This put new strength in him; but his old doubts persisted. After that his first wife died and he married a second time. As this

wife was a woman possessed, he had her initiation by his own guru. This, however, had no effect. At last the couple came to the Mother at Calcutta in 1916 for re-initiation. The Mother agreed to their proposal. But Golap-Ma got wind of this and objected, so that Karnatkumar had to come to the Mother again for reassurance. The Mother raised her hand as a sign of re-affirmation and said, 'I have already given you the word.' On the day of initiation the wife got fever. Nonetheless, they bathed in the Ganges and came to the Mother. Karnatkumar got his initiation first. In the meantime his wife's temperature shot up and she began shaking all over. In that room there were Golap-Ma and Sudhira Devi with her. Seeing the condition of the wife, Golap-Ma began admonishing her in her blunt way, 'She has come to reject her old guru. She has forgotten her *mantra*, and to crown all, she has got fever. There can be no question of initiation at all.' The Mother waited in the shrine-room for some time for the wife to turn up, and in the meantime she heard all that Golap-Ma said. Unmoved by Golap-Ma's arguments and impatient of delay, she called out at last, 'Sudhira, do bring her.' Thus the wife also was initiated. After this she got rid of her trouble.

Sometimes people got initiation in dreams and approached the Mother for confirmation or re-initiation. When one such devotee came, the Mother heard from the person the *mantra* received in the dream, explained its meaning, asked him to use it in his *japa*, and then imparting a new one said, 'Then do *japa* of this one and meditate.' The Mother was seen meditating a while before explaining the dream *mantra*.

Another devotee got a *mantra* from the Master in a dream. The Mother told him, 'Repeat the *mantra* that the Master has given you. I shall give you something too,' and she gave him a new *mantra*.

A boy saw in a dream that the Master seated him on his lap and imparted a *mantra*. The Mother did not give

him any other *mantra* but said, 'You have succeeded in obtaining his grace. You will attain your goal through the *japa* of this *mantra* alone.'

As soon as a certain woman devotee uttered the *Bija* (seed) of a *mantra* she had received in a dream, the Mother said, 'Yes, you belong to that fold. Well, well, you are fortunate.' She did not add any fresh *mantra*, but instructed her to do *japa* of this very *mantra*.

But a *mantra*, just because it was received in a supernormal way, had no appeal to the Mother unless it conformed to scriptures and her own unerring vision. Sri Jatindranath Roy used in his *japa* a *mantra* he had received in a dream. The Mother said, 'Well, dear boy, can there be a *mantra* without a *Bija*?' So she gave him initiation again with a fresh *mantra*. Kusumkumari Aich desired to be initiated by the Mother; but one thing or another hindered her from doing so. In the meanwhile, she got a *mantra* in a dream, which, however, brought her no peace of mind. Hence she went to the Mother and related to her the whole history, on hearing which the latter said, 'Some being is trying to encompass your ruin and to that end has given you that *mantra* in the name of three deities. You need have no fear any longer. Try to forget those few words as early as you can.' Then she gave her initiation with an altogether different *mantra*.

Though she was ever merciful and her life's mission was to save and help people, yet for their own good she often made them wait for some time or refused them at first, so that their eagerness might be intensified or they might repent by detecting their faults through self-analysis consequent on dejection. Sri Nareshchandra Chakravarty went to Jayrambati at the middle of January 1920, with a candidate for initiation at the bidding of Swami Dhirananda; and with them joined another gentleman. As the *Paush-Samkranti* day is observed in Bengal with the eating of many kinds of cakes, and their visit

took place near about that time, there arose on the way a desire in Nareshchandra's mind to eat some cakes at the Mother's house; but he kept silent about the matter. After they had reached Jayrambati and finished their bath, the proposal for initiation was communicated to the Mother through Kishori Maharaj (Swami Parameshwarananda); but the Mother refused. And when she was told that Swami Dhirananda had sent them, she said with a little irritation, 'What of that? My health is extremely bad; should I initiate in spite of that?' This refusal made the two candidates weep, but Kishori Maharaj could not gather up courage enough to approach the Mother again. However, at meal-time at noon Nareshchandra saw that he had on his plate the desired cakes; but as soon as he thought, 'Why has Mother sent this dry stuff; could she not procure a little milk?' he heard the Mother saying, 'Kishori, why have you served dry cakes to the boys? Send them some milk soon.' This emboldened Naresh; hence after siesta, he himself went to the Mother at the suggestion of the friends and interceded on their behalf, whereupon she said, 'So you also advise me to initiate them?' 'Yes, Mother, I do so,' said Nareshchandra with some emphasis. 'But what of the extreme impurity of their bodies?' argued the Mother. And she herself added, 'Well, ask them to live here for three nights. A three nights' stay will purify their bodies; for verily this is Siva's domain.' And as she spoke, she turned her forefinger around to indicate the entire sacred area.

At the 'Udbodhan' when Sri Vasantakumar Sarkar's wife begged to be initiated just after her husband had been blessed with the *mantra*, the Mother directed her for initiation from some monk at the Belur Math. As Vasantakumar's wife persisted in her importunity, the Mother refused again with some annoyance and sat down for worship. This cut her to the quick, and she fell down on the floor with extreme grief and then began singing piteously,

Can She that is the stone-built mountain's daughter have any pity at heart?
Unless She were pitiless, could She kick Her husband on the chest?[1]

The sweet voice and pathetic tone distracted the Mother's attention from the worship. She ordered the wailing woman to sing a few more songs and then asked her to stop, for she could not begin worship so long as she sang. The worship over, the candidate made her request again, which was readily granted. The Mother fixed a date for the happy day and as a present put a betel roll in the devotee's mouth.

Another point to be noted is that, though the Mother was ever merciful, all frivolity and all irrational demands were silenced before her august presence. Sri Navadvip-chandra Roy Varman, who obtained permission for the initiation of two young men, produced them at the 'Udbodhan' on the appointed day. The older of the two was initiated first, and then came the turn of the younger one, who, however, was nowhere to be found. The Mother said sorrowfully, 'The poor fellow is unlucky!' Subsequently, being asked about this flight, the younger one said that his mind was seized with an inexplicable fear.

Sri Chandramohan Datta, who belonged to the salaried staff of the 'Udbodhan', did many odd jobs for the Mother such as going to the market, in which connection he had free access to her. One day in the morning, Swami Shuddhananda, while going to the Ganges for bath with Swami Prajnananda, said to Chandramohan, in mere fun, 'Well, Chandra, you go to the Mother often enough and get from her *prasada* to eat. I tell you something; can you put this to the Mother?' 'There's no question of not being able,' assured Chandramohan. The Swami said, 'Can you tell Mother, "Mother, I want

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1. Uma, identical with Kali in another form, was daughter of the god of the Himalayas, a heartless mass of rocks. Kali on one occasion stood on the chest of her husband Siva.

salvation" ?' 'You wait a little,' said Datta with bravado. 'I shall go forthwith and return in a trice after telling her.' When he went up, the Mother was at her worship. Slowly he walked in, but he felt that for some reason his body shivered. Soon the Mother looked at him and wanted to know the reason for his coming. His heart still palpitated and something seemed to choke his throat. As a matter of sheer habit, however, he said, 'I want *prasada*.' The Mother showed him by a sign the *prasada* kept covered under the cot and again engaged herself in the worship. It took him about an hour to get over that nervousness.

29

A TRANSCENDENTAL PRESENCE

As a sign of cognizing the Lord when He incarnates Himself on this earth it is said in the *Gita* (X. 13):

> All the saints declare you, as also does the divine saint Narada
> Thus also do Asita, Devala, and Vyasa; and you yourself admit this to me.

We saw how the Master worshipped the Mother as a goddess, how he showed reverence towards her in various ways, and how he pointed out her divinity to the devotees. This was also declared times without number by Swami Vivekananda and the disciples of the Master. We shall adduce one more illustration of Swami Vivekananda's respectful reference to her, and then pass on to a consideration of the admission of this fact by the Mother herself.

When seated for initiating Sri Surendranath Sen, the great Swami refused, saying that he had known from the Master that Surendranath would be initiated by one mightier than himself. A few days later, Surendranath dreamt that he was seated on the Master's lap and was receiving the *mantra* from a motherly woman. Long after this in 1911, Surendranath went to Jayrambati during the worship of Durga; and there he was initiated by the Mother. Finding the new *mantra* and the *mantra* of the dream identical and the woman of the dream the same as the Holy Mother in front of him, Surendranath almost lost his outer consciousness. Later, he told the Mother everything about his dream.

The Master spoke of the Mother as the goddess Saraswati come down to impart wisdom, of which we had enough proof in the last chapter. But though this may succinctly describe one of her very important aspects, her personality is by no means circumscribed by this. Generally speaking, she was shy and soft by nature; but at times she could be bold and hard too. This aspect cannot be

called terrific, but it can be described as 'softer than a flower and yet harder than flint', which phrase was used by an Indian poet to mark the characteristics of the supermen. In this connection the reader may remember the incident of the mad Harish, and a few more are presented here to make the point clear.

On a summer evening, the Mother sat telling her rosary on the upper verandah of the 'Udbodhan' overlooking an open space across the road in front, where some people of the labouring class had set up some huts for their families. In one of those huts a man was beating his wife mercilessly. He started with fisticuffs and slaps; then he gave her such a kick that she rolled down into the courtyard with the babe in her arms. There again came down upon her a volley of heavy kicks. The Mother's *japa* stopped. And though she was noted for her suavity and soft, low voice, which could hardly be heard from the ground-floor, she now stood up holding the railing and scolding the man at the top of her voice, 'I say, you wretch, will you kill your wife outright? Alas, what a pity!' The man had lost his balance out of extreme anger, to be sure; but a look at that motherly figure acted on him like a charm on a hooded snake; he lowered his head and retreated at once. The Mother's sympathy made the woman now burst into a torrent of tears. Her fault was that she had not cooked rice at the proper time. A little later, the man's anger subsided, and he came to the woman to console her. At this, all the people who had gathered there on the Mother's verandah, moved away to their respective duties.

Taking advantage of the absence of the Master's nephew Sivaram from his village, his wife wanted, in collusion with the village potentates, to marry her little daughter Panchi to a family supposed to be comparatively lower in social position; and lest someone should undo her plan, she kept the child locked up in a room. Finding Ramlal, the other nephew of the Master, in an embarrassing position, Sri Prabodh Chatterji of Arambagh and

another devotee of Jayrambati skilfully released the child and carried her to Jayrambati before nightfall. They had done this without the Mother's knowledge; but after arriving there, they related everything to her to free their conscience from the sense of guilt. The first thing that the Mother wanted to know from them was whether this had the support of her elder nephew Ramlal. When they replied in the affirmative, she said that they need not worry any more. In the course of the conversation Prabodh Babu expressed his misgiving that the village dignitaries might take offence and create difficulties in future about the construction of the temple of the Master at Kamarpukur. Of course, that was not a very serious matter in his estimation, for the Master did not care for temples and memorials; besides there was no dearth of either even in those days. This remark hurt the Mother, and she said, 'How do you speak, my dear boy? The birth-place of the Master is a sacred place, a seat of his constant presence, and a holy resort for pilgrims. Should one speak of it in such a strain?' Prabodh Babu again apprehended that brother Sivaram's wife might go off her head and set fire to the houses. This made the Mother remark in an unusually sharp, drawling tone, 'It will be fine if it happens; it will be fine if it happens! It will be just as the Master liked. He liked funeral places, and all will be turned into a crematory.' And she burst out into a peal of laughter, in which the others present also joined at first; but as it persisted for long and by stages developed into a side-splitting roar, the others, filled with a super-natural awe, stopped and looked on with trepidation. The very next moment she stopped and broached other topics to divert their attention.

Many are the devotees who were struck with wonder by the sudden expression of the Mother's transcendental moods in the midst of ordinary human preoccupations. These emerged so unawares, like flashes of lightning, and the Mother composed herself so quickly that the devotees

got hardly any time to fathom them adequately. And yet the impression became irresistible that divinity was the essential component of that extraordinary character over which there was a veneer of womanishness to make her life a going concern. Brahmachari Gagan (Ritananda) noticed more than once, that whenever her divine side had the upper hand, it created all around a supernatural atmosphere which by an irresistible magnetic force transported all within its orbit to a higher plane for the time being. One morning, at about nine o'clock, he sat on the Mother's verandah at Jayrambati, chewing some fried-rice, while the Mother swept the verandah. Just then somebody was heard calling from outside, 'Mother dear, may it please you to give me alms!' At this the Mother said aside, 'I can't finish my duties, working though I am with innumerable hands!' Attracted by an ethereally soft and compassionate voice, no sooner did Gagan look up at her face than she stopped her broom and bending forward with one hand on her knees she said with a beaming face, 'Look at the fun; I have only two hands; and here I speak of having infinite hands!'

The Mother's life of motherliness and spiritual ministration may be considered from one point of view as only emanations from the basic fact of her divinity. True it is that the Hindu scriptures enjoin the worship of mothers and spiritual teachers as divinities. But in the life we are pursuing, the devotees came face to face with such superhuman pity, piety, purity, protective power, etc., that irrespective of what the scriptures might enjoin, they instinctively offered their heart-felt devotion and allegiance at the feet of this extraordinary personage who appeared to them as none other than the Universal Mother. Naturally, these expressions of love and adoration had nothing in them of deliberate formalities, but only of a spontaneous hankering for taking shelter under her and opening out their minds for her to read and to guide them as she would.

Some saw the Mother as a goddess in dreams, which, however, appeared to them nonetheless real on that account. A woman disciple named Sumati dreamt that she was worshipping the Mother as the goddess Chandi by offering her a cloth with a broad, red border. She then came to the Mother with such a piece of cloth, but as she could not express her desire out of shyness, she communicated the anecdote to the Mother through an intermediary. On hearing this the Mother smiled and said, 'The Universal Mother sent you the dream, don't you agree, my dear? Well, give me the cloth; it has to be worn anyway.' She wore it that very night (third week of October 1918) as it was holy to Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune. In the evening there came an old woman with all the accessories for the worship of the goddess and with these she adored the Mother, and then saluted her after offering an anna at her feet. The Mother said to the others present, 'Alas! She is in great tribulation, my dears, she is very poor.' The woman's only son had become insane after graduation and was nowhere to be traced; and the husband too was as good as mad because of that shock. The Mother blessed her sincerely.

Some may argue that though the Mother practically admits her divinity in the two foregoing instances, yet this avowal is so inextricably mixed up with her solicitousness for avoiding any disappointment in the minds of the devout or afflicted souls, that such examples should not be cited as indubitable proofs of her admission of divinity. Still we have to remember that we are engaged in this book in depicting the Mother's character in full; and we ask our devout readers not to leave this interesting pursuit all of a sudden, but to comprehend her personality in all its variety and amplitude. We are in the presence of a life above and beyond the human level, in the comprehension of which reverence is more helpful than rashness, and faith more than a frivolous display of one's intelligence. That is how our progress will be ensured, and we shall be vouchsafed more eloquent revelations.

The Mother was once coming to Jayrambati from Kamarpukur long after the passing away of the Master. Her nephew Sivaram, who was then very young, followed her with a bundle of clothes. When they reached the field in the vicinity of Jayrambati, some idea crossed Sivaram's mind and he stood still. The Mother, not knowing his mood, proceeded a little and then, missing the sound of his footsteps, looked back to find him motionless. She said with amazement, 'What's the matter, Sivu? Come forward.' 'If you tell me one thing,' said brother Sivaram, 'then only shall I proceed.' 'What's that?' inquired the Mother. 'Will you tell me who you are?' put in Sivaram. 'Who should I be? I am your aunt,' pleaded the Mother. 'Then go,' said Sivaram nonchalantly. 'Here you are near your house. I won't proceed further.' The sun was setting; and so in a worried tone the Mother said, 'Look at that! Who can I indeed be, my dear? I am a woman, your aunt.' 'Very good,' persisted Sivaram. 'You can as well go.' Finding Sivaram still standing at his post, the Mother said at last, 'People say, I am Kali.' To be doubly sure Sivaram asked, 'Kali? Truly so?' The Mother said, 'Yes.' That delighted Sivaram, and he said, 'Now, come, let us go.' Then he followed her to the village.

On hearing that the Mother would be starting for Calcutta in the middle of February 1920, Sivaram came to her one day at about eleven o'clock and told her after saluting her that he would not return that day to Kamarpukur, as he had finished all work for the day at the shrine of Raghuvira including worship and laying Him to sleep. This displeased the Mother, and she asked him to return that very day to do those things over again according to traditional form and in proper time. And she told Brahmachari Varada to pack up for him some fruits and vegetables. At three in the afternoon she called Varada again to instruct him to accompany Sivaram with the bundle up to the river Amodar. This he did. But a little later, Sivaram was seen crying with his head on the Mother's feet

'Mother, tell me what will be my lot? Do tell me.' The Mother said, 'Sivu, get up; why should you worry? You have served the Master so much, and how greatly he loved you! What anxiety need you have? You are already free even in this life.' But Sivaram persisted, 'No, you take over my burden, and tell me if you are really what you earlier told me you were.' The more the Mother consoled him and patted him touching his head and chin, the more he cried and said, 'Assure me whether you have accepted all my burden, and whether you are Mother Kali Herself.' The Mother had been moved by Sivaram's tears and tenacity; now his yearning produced so great a change in her that it struck Varada standing by her, that she was at that moment no human being. In that elevated state she laid her hand on Sivaram's head and said solemnly, 'Yes, that's so.' Sivaram at once lifted his head and kneeling before her chanted with folded hands the *mantra* of salutation from the *Chandi*, '*Sarva-mangala-mangalye*,' etc. The Mother kissed him by touching his chin with her hand; and he wiped away his tears and started for Kamarpukur, his eyes beaming with delight, and the bundle of fruits and vegetables under his arm. At the Mother's bidding, Varada went for the second time to help him with the bundle up to the river. Outside the village Sivaram turned happily towards Varada and said, 'Brother, Mother is Kali Herself. She's the wielder of people's destiny; through her grace comes freedom. Do you understand?'

At this stage, the Mother declares her divinity not only indirectly through action, but also by word of mouth. If it be contended that even here the avowal is not voluntary inasmuch as it was occasioned by Sivaram's obstinacy, then we may point out that the third person who happened to be there did not understand the Mother's declaration as mere empty words for mollifying Sivaram. Rather he accepted it as a solemn and sincere avowal. Moreover, on the second occasion the Mother was not helpless; she could afford to deny; and such denials were

not quite unknown. Whenever a devotee's assertion seemed to be nothing more than idle fancy or baser sycophancy, the Mother never stooped to encourage such morbid sentimentalism, but rather denounced it severely, though there, too, a discriminating mind could discern the underlying truth that her depreciation was not tantamount to a denial of divinity, but emphasized her preference for playing the human role more thoroughly for some reasons best known to herself.

In her everyday dealings, the unassuming Mother claimed no higher position for herself than that of an ordinary mortal consecrated to the service of the Master; and that fact she impressed indelibly on all who came into contact with her. After initiation she pointed to the Master and said, 'He it is that is the guru.' In the course of conversation her divine mood might steal upon her surreptitiously; yet in the work-a-day world she never consciously allowed it any sway. When one day during her last illness, an old woman devotee began eulogizing her by saying, 'You are the Mother of the Universe, you are all', there descended on the devotee this burst of harsh rebuff, 'Tut, tut, "Mother of the Universe!" I am what I am just because he granted me refuge at his feet through his mercy. "You are the Mother of the Universe, you are such-and-such!" Get out of this place.' In fact, though she was too soft to touch anyone in matters of belief, she could never tolerate flattery.

One day at Jayrambati, the portion dealing with the Master's marriage was being read from the Bengali poetical work *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* before the Mother and some others, on the verandah of her house. As that portion depicted her as the Mother of the Universe and was eloquent with her praise, she left the place.

Before starting for the South, the Mother was, one noon, sitting absent-mindedly at Kothar and thinking alone about the miseries of the world and the Master's repeated incarnations for its redemption. When an attendant came

there, she said to him, 'So the Master comes again and again — the same moon every night. There's no escape, he is caught in it. As they say,

> Coming many a time and oft, you get sorrows upon sorrows;
> And how long still would you endure this pain?

Is that the lot only of men? It is that of the Master as well. So I have been thinking. I see no end to this. What suffering for the Master! Who will understand?' The attendant suggested, 'Why of the Master alone, Mother? It's yours, too. The Master and you are really one.' 'Fie!' admonished the Mother. 'Should one utter such a thing, my foolish boy! I am only his servant. Did you not read, "You are the mechanic, and I the machine; you the housewife, and I the house; I work as you make me do"? The Master is all; there's none but he.'

Some readers may be thinking, 'This much is enough for us to draw our own inference: "The Mother did not think of herself as an avatar nor did she preach this. The Master alone is the avatar. But the Mother deserves a very high position in the religious history of the world by her being the consort of the Master, the spiritual guide of many, and a dynamic centre of inspiration for the life divine."' We would plead with such readers for a little more patience and indulgence; for the logic of events forces us further ahead. In illustrations of this we may cite the case of Sailabala Chaudhury who asked the Mother, 'Mother, you instructed me as to how I should do the *japa* of the Master's name; how shall I do yours?' The Mother replied, 'You may do so (thinking of me) as Radha or any other (goddess) — in fact, under any guise you find convenient. If you can't conceive of me as anybody else, it will do to think (of me) as simply the Mother.' On another occasion she said to a disciple, 'Now that you have come here, you must have done so with some special attitude; you might have come thinking (of me) as the Universal Mother.'

There are many instances of such tacit disclosures in the course of events or of conversations. In 1919, when

Varada was bringing Doctor Prabhakar Mukherji from Arambagh for the treatment of the mother of the widow of Navasan, then on her death-bed at Koalpara, Sri Manindra Bose of the same town accompanied them in a bullock-cart. The scorching midday sun made them all thirsty and so Manindra requested Varada to obtain from the adjoining village some cucumbers and watery roots. Varada searched from door to door, but failed to get these fruits or roots; and then he plucked some green mangoes from a wayside tree, which were so sour that none but village-folk could touch them. 'Where are the roots?' inquired Manindra. Varada replied in fun, 'When no cucumber or root could be had even after ransacking the village, then suddenly the memory of the Treta-yuga bounced upon my mind, and I threw stones to pluck the mangoes.[1] Now you can quench your thirst at will.' Needless to say, that without salt nobody could utilize those fruits. When they reached Koalpara and related the whole incident to the Mother, she smiled broadly and said, 'Yes, my boys, "Each belongs to his own (fold) and incarnates as such in every age." How can I have all these works of mine done unless they are there? Depending on them I have been living here in this forest, amidst dangers, with Radhu in her present condition.'

One day at the end of 1909, a monastic disciple was regretting to the Mother that even after so much of experience and experiment, he had not been able to believe her to be his own mother. The Mother assured him, 'If not your own (mother), why should you be coming so often? "Each belongs to his own (fold) and incarnates as such in every age." (I am) your own mother, as you will recognize in time.'

In domestic dealings or conversations with common people there were sudden disclosures of this real nature

1. According to Hindu mythology there are four ages—Satya (golden), Treta, Dvapara, and Kali (iron). Ramachandra and his wife were born in the Treta-yuga and had the monkeys as their followers and soldiers. Varada here likens himself to one of those tricky monkeys.

of the Mother. During her last stay at Jayrambati, the woman who served as cook came to her one night at nine o'clock to say that she had touched a dog. As touching the dog is polluting according to the Hindus, she would have to bathe in that winter night. The Mother said, 'Don't bathe so late in the night. Wash your hands and feet and change the cloth.' But she protested, 'How can that suffice?' The Mother suggested, 'Then take Ganges water.' But as this too was not adequately purifying according to the cook, the Holy Mother, who was holiness itself, said at last, 'Then touch me.' This opened the eyes of the cook, and for the time being she was saved from her mania for purity, as also from an uncomfortable cold bath.

When the Mother was engaged in her worship at the 'Udbodhan', the mad aunt went on abusing her. After the worship, the Mother looked at her and said, 'What a lot of persons there are who meditate and perform austerity and yet can't get me; and you miss me even though you have got me!' At Banaras the mad aunt had cursed the Mother the whole night, saying, 'Let my sister-in-law depart, let my sister-in-law die.' With reference to this the Mother said in the morning, 'My youngest sister-in-law does not know that I am deathless.'

Self-revelation and self-concealment alternate in the unfolding of the Mother's life. From distant parts people pour in to worship her as a goddess and yet the villagers understand nothing of this — to them she is ever their aunt, their sister, or niece, and nothing more. Once a villager, put the question to her, 'So many people come to see you from such distant lands; and yet why can't we understand you?' The Mother replied, 'What does it matter, if you can't? You are my friends, and so I am yours.' The village watchman Ambika said, 'People call you goddess, deity, and what not; as for us, we understand nothing of that.' The Mother said, 'Why need you understand? You are my brother Ambika and I am your sister Sarada.' She

kept herself informed of the weal and woe of the villagers and identified herself with these. Once a monk, who had just returned from famine relief activities in the Bankura district, was giving to the Mother an account of the work done by the Ramakrishna Mission. After hearing him through, she moved her hand in a circle around and said, 'Mind you, my son, by the grace of Mother Simhavahini, there's nothing of all this (distress) within this area (Jayrambati).' The monk said, 'I know nothing of Simhavahini. It's because of your presence that there is nothing of that here.' The Mother kept silent.

Harassed by the tyranny of her relatives, she said one day at Jayrambati, 'I warn you, don't you molest me too much. If the being that is within this body should once raise its hood, then not even Brahma, Vishnu, or Maheshwara will have any power to save you.' At another time she said to a devotee with reference to Radhu's behaviour at Koalpara, 'I tell you, my daughter, know this body (pointing to her own) to be divine. How much more of mortification can this put up with? Can anyone but the Deity endure so much? I tell you, my dear, none of them will understand me so long as I am here; they will understand everything hereafter.'

How can mere mortals cognize the Goddess who descended as a woman, unless She Herself made it known? The Great Mother descends on earth to teach people love and devotion; but in consideration of the limited faculty of man, She has to cover up Her divinity sufficiently to make it appealing and comprehensible to the human heart and intellect. And as a result of the interplay of these opposing factors; She continues to be unrevealed to the generality of men; and only a fortunate few can understand Her. One day (September 1918) Nalini Devi asked the Mother before two women disciples, 'Well, aunt, people call you the Indwelling Entity; are you really so?' The Mother only smiled a little. But when Nalini pressed her question again, she said, 'They say so out of devotion. Who indeed

can I be, my dear? The Master is all. You pray to the Master so that I may not fall a victim to egotism.' This humility and attempt at self-concealment made one of the women devotees burst out laughing, and in the course of the conversation she remarked, 'There are many who call the Mother, the Universal Mother; but the Master alone knows how deep any one's faith is. In the mouths of unbelieving people this sounds like parrot-like repetition.' The Mother joined in the laugh and said, 'That's true enough, my dear.' The woman further said that none could understand the Mother unless she made herself known out of her mercy. And then she added, 'And yet the Mother's divinity consists in this that in her there's no trace of egoism. All mortals are full of self-conceit. See, or instance, how thousands of people prostrate themselves at her feet calling her, "You are Lakshmi, you are the Mother of the Universe." If the Mother were a mortal, this would puff her up with pride. Can a mere mortal digest so much of honour?' The Mother only cast a smiling glance at the devotee.

We now turn to an incident of the old Dakshineswar days. Yogin-Ma had then become very intimate with the Mother. One day the Mother asked her, 'Yogin, do you worship with dry *bel* leaves?' Yogin-Ma used to pluck green *bel* leaves from the trees at Dakshineswar and offer them in her worship even after they became dry; and hence she replied, 'Yes, Mother. But how could you know this?' Cheerfully the Mother said, 'This morning during meditation I saw you offering dry *bel* leaves to m...', and without completing the word she quickly concluded, 'during your worship.' The intelligent Yogin-Ma looked astonished at the Mother, who blushed and held her in a warm embrace. That created in the latter's mind the impression of her own daughter Ganu holding her in her arms; and not knowing what she did, she held the Mother fast to her bosom and kissed her. When she returned to her senses she saluted the Mother and took the dust of her feet. The

Mother also left the place and stood out on the verandah of the Nahabat.

When the inquirer belonged to a high level of spirituality, the Mother admitted her divinity without reservation. Once Swami Tanmayananda worshipped the Mother's feet at Jayrambati and placed them over his head. But the Mother forbade him to do so, explaining that the Master stays in the head, God Himself sits on the thousand-petalled lotus there. The Swami at once asked her, 'If the Master is God Himself, who are you then?' Without the least hesitation the Mother replied, 'Who else should I be? I, too, am the Divine Mother.'

In this connection we recollect her placing her own photograph by the side of the Master's at Koalpara and worshipping both, of which we have written earlier.

During the Christmas holidays of 1910, a candidate for initiation offered flowers at the Mother's feet at Kothar and then presented her a piece of cloth and a rupee. The Mother declined the gift saying, 'You are in straitened circumstances and have your own wants. Why, then, this offering?' The devotee explained that the money belonged to the Mother; and if a little portion of a son's earning could be utilized for the service of his mother, he should feel thankful.' At this the Mother said, 'Ah! What love, my dear, what love!' The devotee had heard from others, 'The Mother is Kali Herself, the Primal Energy, the Deity.' He wanted a confirmation of this from the Mother herself; for the *Gita* speaks of such a self-avowal. Hence he said to the Mother, 'I believe what I have heard of you. Yet if you yourself tell me so, I can be free from any lingering doubt. I want to learn from your own words, whether that is true.' The Mother said, 'Yes, it is so.'

In 1913, at Jayrambati, Radhu fell ill after Bhudev's marriage, and the Mother was by her side, feeding her with milk, when the mad aunt came and sat near by. Radhu did not want her 'Bad mummy' to be there and so she pushed her a little, when, as chance would have it, the

aunt's feet touched the Mother's hand slightly. This disrespect shown to the Mother, unintentional though it was, made the aunt uneasy, and instead of laying the blame on herself she shifted it to the Mother and said, 'Why did you touch my feet with your hand? Dear me! What will now be my lot!' The Mother laughed heartily at this queer expostulation. Brahmachari Rashbihari, who was there, said, 'Though the mad one abuses and dishonours the Mother, she is yet afraid of touching the Mother's hand with her feet!' The Mother explained, 'My son, didn't Ravana know that Rama was none other than Brahman in Its fullness — Narayana Himself; and that Sita was the Primal Energy — Mother of the Universe?[1] Yet he came to play that part! Does she not know me? She knows everything, and yet she comes to play this role.'

Out of consideration for certain devotees she seemed to be unconsciously revealing her true stature. When Vaikuntha went to see the Mother at Kamarpukur, Ramlal and Lakshmi Devi were also there. At the time of bidding good-bye to the devotee the Mother suddenly said, 'Vaikuntha, call on me!' and the next moment she checked herself and said, 'Call on the Master; calling on him means calling on all.' Lakshmi Devi who heard it all, protested, 'No, Mother, should you speak thus? This is very wrong on your part. If you wheedle the boys thus, what will they do?' The Mother pleaded, 'Why, what have I done?' Lakshmi Devi replied, 'This very moment you told Vaikuntha, "Call on me," and again you say, "Call on the Master."' The Mother argued, 'Calling on the Master is certainly as good as calling on all.' Not silenced by the Mother's logic, Lakshmi Devi impressed it on Vaikuntha that what he had heard that day from the Mother was very valuable; it was a declaration as well as

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1. Ravana, the demon king of Sri Lanka abducted Sita, and Rama killed him. In his previous birth Ravana was a door-keeper of Narayana in heaven, but owing to the curse of an offended brahmin he fell and was born as Ravana. Narayana incarnated as Rama and killed him.

a direction by the Mother herself, so that Vaikuntha should call on the Mother. The Mother listened without further objection.

A woman devotee asked, 'Why can we not realize that you are the Goddess?' The Mother replied, 'Can all and sundry do so, my dear? There lay a piece of diamond on a flight of steps (of a tank). Every one took it for an ordinary stone, rubbed his feet against it after bath and went away. One day a jeweller came to those steps and discovered that it was an exceptionally large and priceless diamond.' How few discovered the real stature of the Mother! To whom, therefore, was she to disclose her identity; and even if she did so, who would believe her? Hence her references to this fact seemed, often enough, halting or ambiguous. And yet at times, there was no hesitation, she avowed her divinity then frankly enough. Kedar said once, 'Mother, nobody will care for the goddesses Shashthi, Sitala, etc., after you.' The Mother replied, 'Why should they not? They are only my own parts.' Another day, Kedar was talking with the Mother at the Jagadamba-Ashrama at Koalpara, when some people came to offer worship to Shasthi under a nearby banyan tree to the accompaniment of beating of drums. As this interfered with the conversation, Kedar said in disgust, 'Ah! Why don't you stop, my fellows!' The Mother at once interceded, 'How you behave, Kedar! I indeed am all! Why do you get irritated?'

Now we proceed to record some incidents from the Mother's life which were not only authentic evidences of her divine power according to the devotees who personally witnessed them but were calculated to intensify other people's faith and devotion and thus help their spiritual development. These may not appear as so very presentable or noteworthy to people who are swayed by modern rationality and so-called scientific outlook; they may be considered devitalizing and interdictable by the shrewd politicians who aim at basing society on mere ethics and

utility. We are also aware that in the lives and teachings of the Master, the Mother, and their blessed children, spirituality in its purest form had the pride of place while supernormal powers were considered as unwelcome intruders. Yet as impartial biographers, we cannot ignore these facts. While presenting these, we leave the readers free to evaluate them and ascertain their meaning according to their personal likes and dislikes. Such anecdotes are to be met with in superhuman characters all over the world and in all ages. People round whose lives spread such ideas and beliefs must have something unique in them. We frankly admit without any hesitation that we cannot prove to others' satisfaction the genuineness of these facts. But if some people cannot be convinced of the truth, there is no reason why we should reject the testimony of others. This is the only excuse under which we take shelter here.

Professor Gokuladas De, then studying for the B. A. degree, once fell ill and as a consequence stopped going to the college for some time. Master Mahashaya took this opportunity to teach him to read the *Chandi* in a sweet musical tone; and Gokuldas soon learnt it. One day, when out on the morning walk by the Ganges, he found the Mother sitting rapt in *japa* and meditation on the lowest of the steps leading down to the water. Gokuldas began chanting the verses of the *Chandi* in his newly acquired tune in such a low voice that there was no possibility of his being heard by the Mother from so far below. When he intoned the verse, '*Saumya - saumya - tarasesha - saumye - bhyas - tvatisundari*'[1], the Mother turned back to find the devotee there, raised both her hands in token of blessing, and then got merged in her *japa* again.

The professor records another experience thus: 'During the few years that I had acquaintance with her (Mother), she never asked me such questions as where

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1. 'Charming, more charming than all charming things; yea surpassingly beautiful.' *Chandi* (I. 81).

my house was, how I was engaged, how many brothers we were, or who my father was. But one day when I went to salute her, it was astonishing to hear her mention by names my two brothers and ask how they were. As she referred to one of them as Nalin instead of Lalit, I thought that it was a slip of tongue and I smiled. But when I told this fact to my mother on returning home, she said, " The Mother of the Universe has spoken correctly. His name as a boy was Nalin which was afterwards changed to Lalit ".' (*Udbodhan*, Paush, December-January, 1937-38).

R. one day prayed, as he massaged the Mother's rheumatic feet with an oil, that the disease might be transferred to his body and the Mother be cured. The Mother smiled indulgently and said, 'What are you thinking, my boy? May you live long. I have grown old; how much longer should I live? Should one think like that? May the Master grant you a long life.' And she blessed him by touching his head.

At one time in 1918, Sri Lalitmohan Saha became so depressed in mind that, becoming angry with the Master and the Mother, he resolved not to visit the Mother any more. But pressed by friends, he had to go to the 'Udbodhan'. That day many devotees saluted the Mother, with none of whom she talked. Last of all she saw her petulant devotee and asked him, 'Are you well?' Ironically he replied, 'Yes, Mother, very well, indeed!' In answer the Mother smiled benignly on him and said endearingly, 'How's that, my boy! That is the nature of the mind. Should one behave like this just because of that?'

In 1915, when Sri Mahendranath Gupta reached Jayrambati, he had it in his mind to worship the Mother's feet with flowers and sandal-paste, though he could not imagine how he could procure these in an unknown place. Just then the Mother sent him some flowers and sandal-paste through a little niece of hers, through whom also she told him, 'If that boy wants to offer flowers, he can come now to do so.'

Swami Tanmayananda, while on his way from Koalpara to Jayrambati, thought within himself that if he could do some little service to the Mother he would be fortunate. Reaching there he found her sitting with her legs stretched and a pot of oil nearby. Tanmayananda began massaging her feet with the oil, and the Mother instructed him as to how each part of the legs was to be rubbed. When the devotee had served her in this manner to his heart's content for about twenty-five minutes, the Mother said, 'I hope you are now satisfied. Let me now go in for bath; I have to worship the Master.'

One afternoon, Praphullamukhi Bose found on reaching the 'Udbodhan' that the widow of Navasan was bringing in the Mother's quilt, mattress, etc., from the terrace, inserting them into their covers and then spreading the bed. She thought within herself, 'If I could but get this work to do!' As soon as the widow of Navasan left, the Mother entered the room and glancing at the bed said, 'Do you notice, my daughter, how she has muddled everything! She has used one cover for another. You, my good girl, change the covers and do the bed over again.' Praphullamukhi had her wish fulfilled.

One day, in July, Swami Mahadevananda went to Haldi-pukur at the Mother's bidding to purchase some kerosene oil, flour, etc., weighing altogether more than eighty pounds. As the Mother had not asked him to engage any bearer, he carried the load on his head. The road was slushy and slippery and the load seemed to become heavier at every step, till at last he could bear it no longer. Nevertheless, he resolved not to yield to any weakness; and astonishingly enough, as he stepped forward with this determination and cleared a hurdle immediately in front, the burden became lighter, so that he covered the remaining distance without any trouble. But this sudden change set him thinking about the cause; and as he entered the Mother's house in a pensive mood, he found her pacing up and down her verandah with a flushed face and scared

eyes, and saying to herself, 'Why did I not ask him to engage a porter?' When Mahadevananda took down the burden, she said, 'You should have taken a porter. What did it matter if I had not said so? Should one walk that way?'

Some incidents prove her foresight and premonition. When Vaikuntha was going away from Jayrambati after paying his respects to the Mother, she said, 'You go home straight from here; you needn't now go to the (Belur) Math or anywhere else. Go home and serve your parents; this is the time for serving your father.' At the time of leaving home Vaikuntha had seen his father in normal health; but on returning there, he found him on his death-bed. The old man passed away in a week's time.

Swami Mahadevananda went to Jayrambati from Koalpara with a basket of vegetables. When he was about to return, the Mother forbade him saying, 'Don't go; it will rain soon.' The Swami paid no heed and started after some light refreshment. The Mother followed him outside to show him the clouds in the sky; but there was not a single patch, Mahadevananda saluted her and laughed heartily as he walked on. But as he crossed the Amodar and was in the open field of Dessera he was caught in such a heavy shower that he was completely drenched and had to run for shelter into the house of a low-caste poor man.

The Mother was busy packing her things on the day preceding the Durga worship of 1912; for she was to start for Banaras just after the festival. At noon the sister of the poet-dramatist Girishchandra Ghosh came to make her obeisance. When taking leave she said, 'Good-bye, Mother.' Absent-mindedly the Mother replied, 'Yes, you can go.' As soon as she had descended the steps, the Mother thought, 'What an evil thing I have uttered, I said "go[1]"! I never speak to anybody thus.' As ill luck would have it, that lady passed away that very night. The news made the

1. Indians, when taking leave, say, 'May I come now?' and the answer given is, 'Yes, you may come.' They do not use 'go' in this context under

Mother extremely sorry and she said, 'What a pity that such a thing slipped out of my lips!'

The Mother initiated Sri Hemchandra Dasgupta at Jayrambati and taught him how to keep count of the number of *japa* with the fingers. But as he could not master the process, she said, 'You will learn it from Suren.' Suren Babu then lived at Ranchi and Hem Babu would be going to his own post at Chittagong, the two places being diametrically opposite. Hence he said, 'How can that be?' The Mother simply said, 'Well, it will somehow come to pass.' And most astonishingly, they met each other in the steamer at Goalunda—Suren Babu was going from Ranchi to Dacca.

Before the passing away of the Master's disciple Purnachandra Ghosh, the Mother remarked at seeing his mother coming to her at the 'Udbodhan', 'There she comes. What does she mean by coming to vex me every day saying, "Mother bestow your blessing, cure Purna"? I know it as a certainty that Purna won't recover; yet to console them I have to say that he will.' That day, too, Purnachandra's mother saluted the Mother, repeated her prayer and had in return a few words of solace. When she left, the Mother remarked, 'The Master had warned. "He won't live long if he is married."' She didn't mind it then; she hurriedly married him, lest he should become a monk.' Some days later, the Mother, Yogin-Ma, and others lay down for rest after the evening service, and the Mother fell asleep. Suddenly she started up and said, 'Is Purna dead, Yogin?' Much astonished, Yogin-Ma asked 'Who told you, Mother?' The Mother replied, 'I was asleep and I suddenly heard somebody saying that Purna had died.' Yogin-Ma then confirmed that the mishap had really occurred in the afternoon (November 1913) though she had not been informed. That night the Mother kept on sorrowing for this beloved disciple of the Master.

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the belief that to permit 'to go' is as good as asking one to depart from this life.

The Mother's blessing for her disciples was infallible. Sri Purnachandra Bhaumik was once in some great difficulty in his service, which might lead to his being gaoled. He related the whole affair to the Mother, who, however, held out the hope, 'There's no cause for fear; you need have no anxiety.' He soon overcame the difficulty.

Sri Surendranath Roy of Barisal was once attacked with a deadly disease which was diagnosed as tuberculosis and his life was despaired of. But he had a strong desire to see the Mother before he left this world. Accordingly, he invited her through a letter. In response the Mother sent him a photograph of hers with a bound volume of the Bengali magazine *Udbodhan*; and she wrote that though it was not possible for her to be personally present, he should look at her pohotograph and read the volume; furthermore that he would recover from the disease. Surendranath found the real Mother there in the photograph, which he kept at his head. He soon came round.

Owing to continuous drought the crops in the fields of Jayrambati and the neighbouring villages began to be scorched away. The helpless and scared farmers told the Mother. 'This year, Mother, there's no hope of keeping our children alive—all will have to die of hunger.' Their distress moved her, and she went with them to look at the fields. There she could not control her feeling of dismay, and supplicated with extreme humility, 'Alas, Master! What's this that you have done! Should every one die of starvation after all?' That very night rain poured down in torrents and the crop was so successful that year that the peasants had no such happy memory for many years past.

In November 1918, a Brahmachari from Koalpara came down to the groundfloor of 'Udbodhan' at about 10 p.m. at the call of Swami Saradananda to find Sri Napharchandra Kole of his village waiting to make obeisance to the Mother. According to the Swami's direction the Brahmachari informed the Mother and led the old gentleman to her. There Napharchandra held the

feet of the Mother with both hands and with his eyes full of tears said, 'Mother, I have come to you as I am in imminent danger. Some of my grand-daughters and a grandson have died of influenza. And now some more granddaughters and the only surviving grandson are in precarious condition. Mother, you will have to so ordain it that my line is not broken.' The Mother said, 'Dear me! Why should you be so apprehensive? You are a blessed and fortunate man.' But he still pleaded, 'No, Mother, I don't want to hear such platitudes. May I not have to suffer the pangs of separation from my grandson.' Thus he spoke and wept holding on to her feet all the time. The Mother said, 'Don't you be overwhelmed; please get up. Very well, I shall pray to the Master.' Napharchandra still implored till at last the Mother uttered in a solemn voice, 'No, you need have no fear.' That comforted the gentleman; he wiped his tears and went down. The Mother sent two sweet dishes for him, which he accepted, and departed happily. He had his wish fulfilled.

Kshirodebala Roy was a widow from an early age. About a year before she became widowed, she was one day dressing some green papaw for the kitchen, when the juice of the fruits affected her fingers which had been injured a little earlier while getting the nails pared by a barber; so that the fingers became swollen and later developed sores which lasted for some twelve years. Though at times the sores seemed to subside a little, they flared up virulently when in contact with water. After she became acquainted intimately with the Mother she had one of those attacks. She decided, on coming to the Mother one day, that she would not touch her feet with the hands while bowing down to her. But as she noticed another lady wrapping up her hands with the hem of her cloth and touching the Mother's feet reverentially with those covered hands, she too decided to follow that method, though with herself this was a novelty. This unusual procedure, however, did not escape the careful eyes of the Mother, who questioned Kshirodebala

and found out the truth. But instead of taking offence, she said tenderly, 'My daughter, such is the condition with me nowadays, that I am ever engaged with myself and do not look much to your needs. You worship the Master with this hand, and that's why the sore persists. Anyway, come with me. Be quick, for they will soon carry away for throwing into the Ganges the flowers etc., that were offered to the Master and the water in which his feet were washed.' Going to another room she said, 'There you see, there are all those things in that *Kamandalu* (ascetic's water-pot). Insert the whole palm into it.' That being done she said, 'The hand will have no more ailment. But try to avoid touching fish, meat, garlic, and onion as far as you can; for you can't avoid touching these altogether.[1] If you handle these things, there may be a little recurrence of sores. You will be worshipping the Master daily, as a matter of course. When there are those sores, apply the water with which you wash the Master's feet.' Kshirodebala got cured by following this treatment. Whenever there was a recrudescence later on, the touch of the holy water cured her immediately.

When Brajeshwari Devi went to Jayrambati for initiation, she had on her arm a silver amulet as a preventive against hysteria. She had fits whenever anybody reminded her of the disease, which lasted for a week or so, the fits starting at evening and continuing long into the night. The sight of the amulet roused the inquisitiveness of the mad aunt. But, intervening, the Mother said that the devotee might have worn it because of some disease, and she should not be embarrassed by useless questions. Then she said to Brajeshwari, 'My daughter, you need not wear the amulet any longer. This disease will leave you even without your wearing it.' In fact, she had no attack after this, not even when attending cases of hysteria.

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1. She had to cook for her relatives, though she herself was a strict vegetarian like all orthodox widows.

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THE MOTHER AND THE MASTER

We have discussed how the Master looked upon the Mother. Now we shall try to understand how the Mother estimated the Master. For this we have no great need to turn back to the Dakshineswar and Cossipore days though for bringing out the essential idealogical factors we may have to retrace our steps a little. For the rest we shall keep our vision directed in front.

One day, as the Master sat on his smaller cot in his room at Dakshineswar, and there was none except the Mother who was sweeping the floor, she suddenly asked him, 'Who am I to you?' Without the least hesitation the Master replied, 'You are my Blissful Mother.' Again, when Hridaya one day asked the Mother banteringly, 'Aunt, don't you call my uncle your father', the impromptu answer came from her lips, 'Why do you speak of him as father only? He is mother, father, friend, relative, acquaintance, my nearest and dearest, and everything.' As the Master considered the Mother to be the Divine Mother, the Master was to her the embodiment of all the gods and goddesses; and this she once openly declared by saying, 'He is the goddess Manasa and Ganga, and all.'

It was the second week of June 1913. Dr. Durgapada Ghosh and Sri Surendranath Bhaumik were having a little talk with the Mother before leaving her village home. Surendranath submitted that he had a little difficulty in worshipping the Master, for though he had a vague idea about the identity of the Master with his own chosen Goddess, and so he could worship his chosen Goddess in the picture of the Master, yet he was faced with an incongruity every time he tried to utter the *mantra*, 'With your grace, O Great Goddess, etc.,' at the time of dedicating the fruits of his *japa* to the deity on the completion of the worship. The Mother replied with a hearty laugh, 'Well, my boy, he himself is both the Great God and the Great

Goddess. He is in all the deities and he dwells in all the creatures. One can worship all the gods and goddesses in and through him. You may as well call him the Great God as the Great Goddess.' Another day (end of March 1920), she said to a lady devotee, 'He is everything. He is the Purusha (the Supreme consciousness) and he is the Prakriti (the Primordial Energy). From him everything will flow.' At Jayrambati the Mother at the time of initiating a devotee, asked him to offer at the Master's feet all his works, virtues and vices, merits and demerits; and then pointing to the Master as his guru she gave him the *mantra*. But the devotee thought, 'If the Master is the guru, what is the Mother then?' For he could not realize that the two were but one. And hence he asked her, 'How am I to think on the Master?' The Mother solemnly reiterated, 'He is all—Purusha and Prakriti. If you think on him, you have thought of all.' To a lady devotee the Mother said, 'In the Master are all the deities—not even (the goddesses) Sitala and Manasa excluded.'

At one time they used to bring for her from the temple of Siddheshwari at Baghbazar the water with which the deity had been bathed. One day, after the worship of the Master, Swami Vasudevananda brought to the Mother in two separate pots, the bath waters of the Master and Siddheshwari. 'Why two?' inquired the Mother. When the matter was explained she said, 'It's all one.' As Vasudevananda still held before her the two pots, she said, 'Mix them up.' 'I shall do so from tomorrow,' said the Swami. But the Mother insisted on these being poured into the same pot then and there, and she drank that mixed water.

We read in several Bengali works[1] that though the Mother was so very shy that she never went to the

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1. *Sri Sri Latu Maharajer Smriti-Katha* (p. 278), *Sri Sri Sarada Devī* (p. 56), *Sri Ma* (p. 81), which slightly differ in unimportant details.

Master's room when any gentleman or even a devotee was there, yet when the Master passed away at Cossipore, she could contain herself no longer, but rushed to the room and cried out, 'Mother Kali, dear, for what fault of mine have you left me?'

From such statements and incidents, it appears clear to us that the Mother did not look upon the Master as a mere husband or man, nor even as an ordinary immortal; according to her, he was none other than the all-pervading God Himself. Hence her instruction to the devotees was, 'The Master is everything—he's the guru, he's the chosen Deity.' And about one of her experiences she told Sudhira Devi, 'I was in such a state at one time that I could not even drive away an ant from the food offered (in front of the Master), under the belief that the Master himself was eating it.'

She identified the Master with all the deities and all creation, including even an ant. And her conception of him transcended all forms and ascended to the formless Brahman. Though the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati on the Himalayas is dedicated to non-dualism, the great Swami Vivekananda, during his visit there in early January 1901, found that a shrine-room containing the picture of Sri Ramakrishna had been established and that regular worship was being conducted with flowers, incense, and other paraphernalia. The Swami vehemently denounced this dualistic tendency but he did not order the discontinuance of the worship, as that would hurt the feelings of others. He rather believed that they would realize their mistake and rectify accordingly. The Swami's criticism had the desired effect, and the shrine was broken up. One who still doubted if it was right for him to profess himself a member of the Advaita Ashrama when he leaned towards dualism appealed to the Holy Mother as a final resort, only to receive the reply, 'Sri Ramakrishna was all Advaita and preached Advaita. Why should you not also follow Advaita? All his disciples are Advaitins.'

Just as the Master, though himself a doyen of Advaitins and ever established in non-dualism, found nothing incongruous in having apparently diverse attitudes towards Reality—non-dualistic, qualified non-dualistic, or dualistic—according to the level on which his mind worked for the time being, so also the Mother could offer worship to the Master at the same time that she knew him as the supreme Brahman. From her own account it appears that the first real worship of the Master originated with herself, just as the worship of Sri Chaitanya began with his wife Vishnupriya who had the first image of her consort carved out of margosa wood and had it installed in a shrine. The Mother said that the first copy of the photograph of the Master that is now worshipped in thousands of homes, became so black that it had to be rejected and given to a brahmin of Dakshineswar at his request. When some time later the brahmin went away from the village, he left the photograph with the Mother, who placed it along with other deities and went on offering flowers and food. One day the Master entered the Nahabat and noticing the picture there, said, 'Hullo, dear, what's all this you are doing here?' The Mother, who was cooking under the staircase, came in, attracted by the Master's voice, to find him offering once or twice to that picture some of the *bel* leaves and other things that were there for worship. The owner of the picture never returned; and so it became the Mother's constant companion. It was dark at first, as we have said but gradually it became lighter. The Master got her daily worship. Even during long journeys, she had the picture with her, and made it a point to offer something to it. There was no sanctimoniousness about this worship, though there was enough of love and earnestness. At the time of worship it seemed as though she was sitting in his living presence and acting accordingly, with the greatest intimacy. We quote from one who witnessed this worship day in and day out:

'The framed photograph of the Master rested on a wooden seat in a niche in the wall; and by its side were the image of the child Gopala, and one or two more pictures of other deities. In the morning after taking a little of Ganges water in hand the Mother roused the Master from his sleep—kept erect the picture that lay in sleep. Under the Master's seat in a small brass *Kamandalu* was Ganges water, and near it were sandal-wood, a stone piece on which to make sandal-paste, a *panchapatra*, and some more paraphernalia for worship. After finishing the domestic duties, the Mother sat at about nine'o'clock in the middle of the room, placing the Master in front. She bathed and worshipped him there with offerings of flowers, sandal-paste, fruits, sweets, syrup of sugar-candy, and *halva* (a) sweet preparation made with sugar, butter, and semolina). Then she sat erect in meditation for some time with her hands on her lap. She devoted more time to this worship whenever she had no other special engagement; but she never took too long. She seemed to lose her ordinary consciousness during meditation, after which she made her obeisance to the Master and kept his picture in its previous position. At the end, she took a little of the water with which the Master's feet had been washed, and little bits of *tulasi* and *bel* leaves, if there happened to be any. As flower was a raity as Jayrambati she used them as often as she could get them. In the absence of flowers, *tulasi* leaves and water served her purpose. For *tulasi* she had a certain predilection which she expressed thus, "*Tulasi* is very pure; everything is sanctified if *tulasi* is there." At noon, rice, soup of lentils, and vegetable curries were offered in the Master's name in the kitchen. In the evening, again, she offered to him *luchi*, *chapati*, vegetable curry, milk, molasses, etc. There was no regularity as regards offerings in the afternoon. If any special thing came there by chance, it was offered at about four.'

This was all the formality. And then, as to intimacy, we learn that when she was leaving Koalpara for Calcutta

for the last time, Brahmachari Varada went to her room at five in the morning to find that she had finished worshipping the Master with fruits and sweets and was then saying to him while wrapping the picture with a cloth, 'Get up, it's time to start.' At another time, when the Mother was at Jayrambati, during Jagad-dhatri worship, a devotee found the Mother finishing the Master's worship early in the morning and then at the time of offering food to him saying, 'Mind you, Mother (Jagad-dhatri) is to be worshipped today. Do finish your meal early, for I shall have to go there.' On a third occasion, when there was talk of the Mother's going to her village from Calcutta, but because of the sickness of one or other of her retinue the date was being repeatedly deferred, she was heard saying to the Master, 'Let us go to Jayrambati. Don't you have any liking for the big tank and the *tulasi* leaves there?'

After the dedication of food to the Master, she actually saw him tasting it. When Dr. Lalbehari Sen was on a visit to Jayrambati in 1911, he fell ill. When convalescent, he was given a little *khichudi* as diet by the Mother. As the doctor hesitated, fearing that the food would do him harm, the Mother assured him that he need have no apprehension since the Master had partaken of it. At this the doctor querried, 'Can the Master be seen?' The Mother replied, 'Yes, nowadays he comes at times and wants to eat *khichudi* and cheese.' As somebody regretted at Koalpara that though food was offered to the Master, one could not know whether he accepted it or not, the Mother averred emphatically, 'There's no doubt that he does eat, my boy; if the dedication is made from the bottom of one's heart, he surely eats it.' And she added that when she calls the child Krishna for his meal, he goes to her jingling his anklets and eats with a childish clamour. In November 1914, a woman devotee on entering the chapel heard the Mother addressing the Master thus like a bashful newly married maiden, 'Come, come for food,' and

gentleman's doubts cleared up and he said with delight, 'Mother, now I have got it; you are the same as the Master—identical.' With the same serenity the Mother again said, 'Then eat.'

The Master comes down in every age and his Sakti, the divine Mother, accompanies him. She often pointed out this eternal relationship to the chosen few. Nalini Sarkar of Midnapore asked her once, 'Mother, did you come with all the incarnations?' 'Yes, my son,' replied the Mother.

When the Master comes to us again, his retinue will follow, and his Sakti, the Mother, will again incarnate, though this is by no means a happy development to contemplate. In the course of a conversation Gauri-Ma said one day (February 9, 1912) at the 'Udbodhan', 'The Master said that he would come down again twice; once in the form of a *baul*.[1]' The Mother confirmed her by saying, 'Yes, the Master said, "You will have in your hands (my) hubble-hubble." The Master will have a broken stone vessel in hand. Maybe, the cooking will be done in a broken iron pan. He walks on and on—neither looking to the right nor left.'

Ashutosh Roy, a devotee of Ranchi, had a vision of the Master, by whom he was called at night; and after opening the door he found the Master standing on the road with ochre cloth, wooden sandals on his feet, and a pair of tongs in his hand. A disciple reported the incident to the Mother at Jayrambati, in May 1913, and asked, 'Mother, why did he see him with wooden sandals on his feet and a pair of tongs in his hand?' The Mother replied, 'That's the outfit of a monk. For has he not said that he will come in the trappings of a *baul*? In the attire of a *baul*—with a

1. *Baul* is derived from the word *vatula*, meaning crazy. The *bauls* are a community of god-intoxicated mendicants who sing mystic songs to the accompaniment of *ektara*, an one-stringed musical instrument. They wear long robes often torn to pieces and almost touching the feet; and they do not pay heed to social customs and fineness of manners.

long robe, matted hair on the head, and beard so long. He said, "I shall go home by way of Burdwan; somebody's son will be easing himself on the road; in my hand will be a broken stone vessel, and a bag dangling under my arm." He will be walking on and on, and eating all the time—without looking in any particular direction.' The questioner asked, 'Why the Burdwan road?' The Mother replied, 'The home lies that way.' Again the question was put, 'Is he a Bengali then?' The Mother said, 'Yes, a Bengali. Hearing him I said, "How strange, my dear! What a strange fancy you have!" He smiled and said, "Yes, you will have my hubble-hubble in hand."'

Being told that the Master would again incarnate together with his companions and associates, Lakshmi Devi, his niece, swore, 'I will not be coming again even though I be chopped to pieces like tobacco leaves.' At this the Master replied with a smirk, 'Where will you be if I come away? You will be ill at ease. It's like a float of (the interlocking aquatic plant) *Kalmi*; if one pulls at one end, the whole mass moves.' The Mother, too, disliked the idea. At Vrindaban, when the Mother and the devotees had alighted from the train and Golap-Ma was reaching out their belongings from inside the compartment, she found the hubble-bubble of Latu (Swami Adbhutananda) lying in a corner. So she took it up and handed it over to the Mother. At once Lakshmi Devi twitted the Mother saying, 'There you have already taken in hand the hubble-bubble.' The Mother, too, said, 'Master, Master, here I have finished holding the hubble-bubble,' and she dropped it instantaneously to the ground with a thud.

The Mother told the disciples, 'He (the Master) said that he will live for a hundred years with his children.' According to her, the golden age began from the advent of the Master. He came with some extraordinary souls as his esoteric circle. For instance, the Master himself told her that Swami Vivekananda belonged to the group of the great seven seers of old and that Arjuna came as Swami Yoga-

nanda. Ordinary people are born and they die; but these highly gifted and illuminated souls accompany an incarnation to advance his mission. About their extraordinary spiritual calibre, she said 'All those who came earlier have come again.' And to her hearers she spoke with pride about the devotees of the inner circle, 'Don't you notice how childlike is Rakhal's (Brahmananda's) behaviour; even now he is like a little boy. And look at Sarat (Saradananda); what a lot of work he does, how many difficulties he shoulders, and yet he never complains. He is a holy man; why should he be doing all this? If they want, they can keep their minds fixed on God day and night. It's only for your sake that they continue on a lower plane. Keep their characters before your eyes, and serve them.' She considered these direct disciples of the Master as her own sons and said, 'Rakhal, Sarat, and others — all of them issued out of my very body.'

From a very remarkable statement about the Master's life as a whole it seems as though in the Mother's estimation the three phases in the Master's life — his *Lila* (play) as an incarnation, his spiritual practices, and his mission after realization — could be arranged in a graded scale. Of these, the first seemed to occupy the pride of place and last came his mission. An incarnation plays out of the fullness of spirit and every word or movement of his is calculated to stir up similar underlying emotions in gifted souls. Here there is no motive, but only living inspiration for others. In the second phase of spiritual practices, his movements seem to be more concretely correlated to, and circumscribed and determined by, his environment; and hence though his divine glory cannot find free play here, the very fact of conformity to human standards makes his life more widely appreciated. In the third phase of encompassing the general weal, all kinds of human factors intervene to shut out and refract the inner light; and here, though his divinity becomes deeply overlaid with humanity, his real mission as the incarnation of the

age is more widely fulfilled. On these matters the Mother said one day to Swami Keshavananda, 'I tell you, my son, it never occurred to me that he practised all the religions with the express *motive* of preaching the idea of spiritual harmony. He was always in his mood of divine ecstasy. He practised all the methods through which the Christians, Mohammedans, Vaishnavas, and others worship God and realize truth, and thereby he tasted God's disports in diverse ways. Days and nights passed by him without any notice. But what you should note, my dear, is that *renunciation* is his special message in this age. Did any one see such natural renunciation any time before? As for the harmony of religions you speak of, that also is true. In previous incarnations, all other spiritual moods looked insignificant because of the emphasis on a particular one.' The truth revealed is higher and more fundamental than either its method of realization or its subsequent promulgation and application. On another day she said to a second devotee, 'Men are ever forgetful of God. And hence, whenever the occasion demands, He comes down now and then to show the way to the worldy by following it Himself. This time He showed renunciation.' In fact, no attempt at world-regeneration can succeed unless it has selflessness as its basis; and without it the realization of God can never be dreamt of.

31

HER HUMAN PERSONALITY

It was April 1919. Seeing that the Mother wailed ike the common people at the death of Maku's son, Neda, :he minds of the devotees present at Koalpara were troubled with doubts. Hence, when saluting her next morning, Sri Narayana Iyengar, a great devotee from Mysore, asked her, 'Why did you cry like an ordinary mortal at the death of Neda?' The simple answer of the Mother was, 'I am in the world, and have to taste the fruit of this tree. That is why I cry.'

This world, which is a creation of God, has a way of its own that all embodied beings have to follow. The Master declared, 'When God incarnates Himself as a man, He has to behave just like any other human being. That's why it is difficult to recognize Him. He has all these, — hunger, thirst, disease, sorrow, and oftentimes fear — just as men have.' He further said, 'Caught in the trap of the five elements, Brahman moans.' (*Kathamrita*, IV. 56, III. 192)

This dual aspect of divinity and humanity was expressed through many talks of the Mother. At the 'Udbodhan' she said one day (September 1918), 'People call me Goddess, and I too think, "That may be really so. Or else how could there be all the strange things that have happened in my life?" Yogen, Golap, and others know much of this. If I should but think, "Let this happen", or "I shall eat this", the Lord somehow fulfils all these.' On another occasion (August 1919) the Mother was at Jayrambati with Radhu. One day she sat after evening to hear the letters being read out to her by a Brahmachari. In one of these, a woman devotee had praised her variously. Hearing this, the Mother said, 'Look here, sometimes it sets me thinking that since I am merely a daughter of Ram Mukherji and there are many other girls of my age at Jayrambati, how do I differ from them? Devotees

come to pay their respects from places unknown to anybody here. Besides, on questioning them I learn that some are magistrates and some are lawyers. Why do these come at all?' She simply drew attention to the problem, but suggested no solution. The Brahmachari, however, had no difficulty in diving deeper and discovering the truth. Hence he pushed the line of thought a step further and inquired, 'Well, don't you always remember your real stature?' The Mother replied, 'Can that always be so? How then could all these works be done? But even in the midst of work, whenever the desire arises, I can get the inspiration with a little thought and then the play of the Great Maya stands revealed.'

We turn back to an earlier time, February 1, 1907, when the Mother was at Jayrambati and a devotee wanted to know if the Master was the ever-present Brahman in Its fullness. As the Mother confirmed the view, the devotee put in again, 'As to that, all husbands are to their wives the ever-present Brahman in Its fullness.[1] I don't ask from that point of view.' The Mother replied, 'Yes, he is the ever-present Brahman in Its fullness — as a husband as also in that other sense.' The devotee then fell to thinking that just like the unity of Sita and Rama or of Radha and Krishna, there must be a unity between the Mother and the Master; and yet as a matter of fact he saw before his very eyes the Mother engaged in domestic duties. To remove his doubt he asked, 'Then why do I see you as though making *chapati* like any ordinary woman? What are all these? Are these *maya*?' The Mother replied, 'What else but *maya*? Why should I be in such a state if not because of *maya*? I should have been sitting by Narayana as his Lakshmi in Vaikuntha. It's just because the Lord likes to disport as a man.' The devotee again asked, 'Doesn't your true nature flash in your mind?' The Mother

1. According to the Hindu belief, husbands are to be looked upon as Siva or Narayana and wives as Sakti or Lakshmi. They are all divine, for they are essentially Brahman.

replied, 'Yes, it does at times and then, I think, "What's this that I am doing? What's this I am engaged in?" Again all these things (pointing in front)—houses, children, etc.,—come to the mind and I forget my essential nature.' And as she had accepted that sport or *maya* out of her free will, she said, now and again. 'It's only by accepting an illusion that I am so', or 'This is nothing but continuing in the midst of an illusion.'

The disports of an incarnation are only apparently human. In the Master's life it strikes one that though he was ever in divine moods, all his activities on the normal plane had a charm and orderliness of their own. On whatever level of existence his mind might be at a given time, it only revealed moral and intellectual perfection of an ideal order to which others might well aspire to rise. This is a special gift to mankind from Sri Ramakrishna who finished his earthly *play* only a few years ago. In studying the Mother's life also, we are forcefully reminded of this fact. Furthermore, just as in the Master's life there is no lack of ideals for the work-a-day world in spite of his constant state of spiritual ecstasy, so also in the Mother's life there is piety, renunciation, selflessness, and divine afflatus and serenity. Alongside of these are her affection, service, liberality, modesty, humility, and other soft human qualities which bring into prominence a much desired corrective to the individualistic and self-centred civilization of the modern age. In fact, even a casual pursuit of this life makes it clear that while the life divine is ever dedicated to general goodwill, the life human is busy with personal welfare.

Bearing all these facts in mind, Swami Premananda once told Swami Keshavananda and other devotees, 'You have seen with your own eyes, how the Mother, who is in reality the Great Goddess ruling over those who wield the destinies of kings and emperors, has yet elected to become a poor woman plastering the house with cow-dung, scouring utensils, winnowing rice and clearing the leavings of the

devotees after their meals. She undertakes all these tasks to teach the householders their domestic duties. What infinite endurance, limitless mercy and absolute absence of egotism are there!' And in a letter he wrote, 'Who has understood the Mother? There is not the least trace of splendour. The Master had at least the brilliance of wisdom. But what about the Mother? For her even that glow is wanting. What a great power is that! Glory to the Mother! Victory to the Mother! Glory to the powerful Mother! The poison that we cannot assimilate, we pass on to the Mother. The Mother takes every one on her lap. Infinite power, limitless pity! Glory to the Mother! Not to speak of us, we have not seen even the Master do so. With how much caution and testing would he accept a man! And here? What do we see here in the Mother? Astonishing, astonishing! She is giving shelter to all, eating everybody's food, and assimilating all. Mother, Mother, victory unto the Mother! Remember that mercy of the Mother, that infinite compassion of the Mother, in weal and woe, in success and failure, in famine and pestilence, in wars and revolutions. Glory unto the Mother! Victory unto the Mother!'

The Mother, too, spoke one day in this very strain. When a disciple said, 'What an abundance of spiritual trances and ecstasies had those who went to the Master! But nothing of that is being done by you to us', the Mother replied, 'As to that, to how many indeed did he do such things, and how selectively at that? Even so his body fell down quite early. To me he has pushed on a line of ants. If I do just as he did, how long will my body last? What a number of childrn I have to tend!'

The fields of application for the spiritual power being different, a certain disparity will be noted in the behaviour of the two personalities. But close scrutiny will reveal their fundamental similarity, nay identity. The renunciation and selflessness which charmed all concerned by their unrestricted expression in and through the life of Sri Ramakrishna, who spent his days in the precincts of a

holy temple in the midst of devout souls, did also enlighten the dark labyrinths of domestic duties by being reflected in a thousand ways against the background of family relationships in and through the life of the Holy Mother. Whereas the Master resorted to such petty desires as 'I shall smoke', 'I shall drink water', in order to chain down to the common plane his mind that ever tried to be lost in transcendental heights, the Mother accepted Radhu for keeping within limitations a mind that would otherwise expand and merge in the Infinity beyond. This may appear as a bondage, but on closer observation we find it as a proof of the limitless will power of the Mother. The Master gave up gold, whose touch caused him pain; the Mother touched it with her head under the belief that it was nothing but the goddess of wealth and good fortune in another form. Rejection of a thing as non-Brahman, and acceptance of it as Brahman, are both fundamentally indicative of enlightenment and non-covetousness. In the light of all such spiritual truths we proceed to a study of the Mother's life in a purely human setting; and in doing so we remind the reader, again, that in any attempt at an analytical comprehension of this character, we must not totally lose sight of her divinity and accept the purely feminine characteristics as a measure of her greatness.

The facts that we shall consider in this chapter fall under two categories: some of them are interlinked with her life, while of others she is but a witness. Her personal acts, sometimes interpreted by herself, are very valuable indeed but the opinions she expressed from a distance are no less so, since any evaluation made by an extraordinarily gifted, cultured, and saintly lady, steeped in the age-old tradition of her race, has its own special appeal. And when we remember that her whole life was meant as a beacon to future generations, these illustrations, through life or comments by word of mouth become all the more significant.

For the little hamlet of Jayrambati, the Mother had a lifelong fondness. Once when she was on the point of leaving for Calcutta, her aunt said, 'Sarada, do come again.' The Mother said, 'It goes without saying that I will.' And to emphasize that promise she touched the floor of the house again and again and laid its dust on her head quoting a line from a Sanskrit verse: 'Mother and mother-country are superior even to heaven.'

She had some sort of relationship established with every villager, aged or young, whatever their social standing. Even people of other villages had a share in that love. On the day of the immersion of the image of Durga, when all came to prostrate themselves before her and to receive her blessing, she never forgot to inquire about and show the utmost consideration for her 'uncle' Kunja who belonged to a lower caste of a different village and was noted for his skill in making images of deities. In such social contacts she did not let her high caste stand in her way.

The great devotee, Girishchandra Ghosh, once declared that 'in the present age Sri Ramakrishna conquered all through his weapon of salutation (humility)'. The Mother's life too was eloquent of this attitude of being lowlier than the lowliest. When as a result of advancing years it became impossible for her to cook for all, an old brahmin woman was engaged in the kitchen. The Mother called her 'aunt'. When the Mother was about to salute this aunt on the evening of the immersion of the Durga image, the old woman protested saying, 'That's unthinkable, Mother! You're the Mother of the Universe; all salute you. I am an ordinary woman; I can't possibly pocket such high honour.' The Mother, however, could not be dissuaded; she saluted the cook and added, 'That can never be; you're my aunt, to be sure.'

There was not the slightest affectation in these dealings. Once Suryanarayana, a cousin of hers, found on reaching Vishnupur from Calcutta with her that he had

left back an article without which he could not go home. Accordingly, a telegram was sent to Calcutta advising its despatch by the next train. Till the thing came, the Mother refused to go away leaving behind her cousin alone, and said, 'Is Surya a stranger to me?'

We have mentioned earlier a number of facts concerning the Mother's attitude to caste. The Master once declared, 'Devotees have no caste.' The Mother seemed to follow this literally in the field of spirituality, though in social dealings she never advocated revolution, but rather conformed to the established norms. In refusing initiation to a certain candidate who had his own family guru, she said, 'One should follow one's family tradition; one has to observe caste so long as one is in society.' When during her last illness it was proposed to feed her with bread, she declined saying, 'My boy, don't you feed me with things touched by Mohammedans during these closing days.' Accordingly, she was given bread made by brahmins. Later on she agreed to eat milkroll loaves on being told that these had been prepared by machines. At this time she developed a distaste for food, so that she had to be allowed a little quantity of rice for which alone she had some appetite. One day Dr. Kanjilal happened to be present at the meal-time. Noticing that the quantity of rice was in excess of what he could allow, he took Sarala Devi, the attendant, to task and said that from the next day he would arrange for paid nurses as Sarala could not be relied on. When the doctor left, the Mother said, 'Forsooth, I shall accept the service of those women in shoes! Does he imagine I shall? I won't be able to do so. Please go on doing the work just as you have been doing.' Actually, the professional nurses never came.

If we are to reconcile the apparent contradiction between her conformity with caste restrictions and her loving relationship with Amzad and others, we have to scrutinize a few more incidents. The Mother had no

hesitation in showing honour to non-brahmins, who were otherwise cultured, highly placed, and respectable in every way. When Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati came to the 'Udbodhan' to examine Radhu (September 1918) the latter saluted the Kaviraj at the Mother's bidding. After the physician had left, some one present there asked, 'Is he a brahmin?' 'No,' replied the Mother, 'he is a Vaidya.' Again it was asked, 'Why then did you ask her to salute him?' The Mother posed the counter question, 'Why should she not?' and then explained, 'How very erudite! They are as good as brahmins. If she's not to salute him, whom should she?' A devotee of the Kayastha caste went to Jayrambati with four others. The Mother's new house was then under construction. She called Radhu and pointing to the Kayastha devotee said, 'Radhu, your elder brother has come; salute him.' The devotee then thought, 'What's this? I am a Kayastha, to be sure.' At the same time this assurance also came to his mind, 'The Mother won't certainly do anything harmful to me.' At last Radhu and the devotee both saluted each other. A devout woman came to the 'Udbodhan' to tell the Mother that she had been initiated in a dream. The Mother confirmed the *mantra* that the devotee had received. And then coming to know that she was the wife of a disciple of the Mother, the latter said, 'Why did you not tell me earlier. O Radhu, O Maku, come to salute the Manager's wife.' Dumbfounded, the devotee objected, 'Mother, what's this that you say? I am a Kayastha by birth, and how can they, who are brahmins, salute me?' The Mother said, 'One shouldn't speak thus. You're a pious soul; devotees have no caste. They stand to gain by saluting you.' When Radhu and Maku came, the devotees grasped their feet, and the Mother said, 'No need of that; she won't allow you to salute. Of a truth, they are devotees, and as such they see the Master in all beings.' On such a high pedestal she wanted to place all human relationships; but weak humanity could hardly have that divine outlook,

and hence adapted its dealings to social requirements even while in the house of God.

During the Christmas holidays of 1912, the Mother was at Banaras, and with her there was Bhanu-pisi of Jayrambati. When Golap-ma heard that two brahmin girls had touched the feet of Bhanu-pisi, she flew into a rage, because honouring a woman of the milkman caste (to which Bhanu-pisi belonged) in that fashion, was, according to Golap-Ma, tantamount to pampering the egotism of all low-caste people, as a result of which they would care little for others. When the Mother came to know of the whole incident she said to the girls, 'Look at Golap's thoughtlessness. When all should be happy on a festive occasion, here she is hurting other's feelings. Don't you mind this, my good girls. All can be saluted as devotees.'

As a solution for the mania for purity, the Mother took help of this same inward vision. Her niece, Nalini, came one day (July 1913) with a wet cloth and explained that she had to bathe since a crow had urinated on her cloth. To this the Mother said, 'I have grown old; I never heard of such a thing as urination by a crow! The mind doesn't become impure unless one has committed many sins, heinous crimes! Mania for purity! The mind baffles all attempt at purification!..As for this mania for purity, one can go on intensifying it without limit; in fact, all things go on multiplying in proportion as you allow them to do so.' On another occasion (July 1912) she said to Nalini Devi. 'In the village, I oftentimes tread on dry faeces. Then I utter (the Lord's name) "Govinda" twice, and at once everything becomes pure. All is in the mind—purity, as also impurity, is in the mind.'

There was no end to such problems that she had to face. In a changing society there are always unchanging customs of long standing which make life intolerable at every turn; and only progressive minds that are firmly rooted in spirituality and yet have a sympathetic vision stretched forward can show the way at such crises. The

Mother used to say, 'One should follow local customs.' But when she said so, she did not connive at brutally suppressing all human aspirations in the name of customs. In certain parts of Bengal, widows observe very stringent rules about food, dress, and other things. Coming to learn of such rigour in the life of a widow, the mother said, 'You should eat *chapati*, *parata* (*chapati* baked in butter), etc., at night. Take these after dedicating them to the Master.' In other words, if it was not allowable, according to local customs to eat rice, there should be found some other reasonable method for the sustenance of the body.

In this respect the natural sympathy and discriminating wisdom of the Mother must have been reinforced by what she saw the Master do one day. That was an *Ekadasi* day, the eleventh day of the moon, when widows of high castes refrain from cooked food in general. Yogin-Ma came with her old aunt to Dakshineswar. The aunt had been fasting that day without taking even water; and on the previous day also she went without food owing to some ceremony in the house. She was very old, and the fasting for two consecutive days made her extremely weak. Arrived at Dakshineswar, as they advanced towards the Nahabat, the Mother noticed the old aunt panting. So she came out to help her, and said, 'Shall I give you a little syrup?' The old lady shook her head in disapprobation. When she had recovered a little, Yogin-Ma led her to the Master's room followed by the Mother. As the old lady climbed the steps of the Master's room, he found to his great concern that she almost crawled. He hurried to the place, and taking hold of her, he asked Yogin-Ma, 'Why is she gasping for breath thus?' Yogin-Ma told the reason, whereupon the Master looked at the Mother and said, 'Could you not give her a little syrup to drink?' The Mother replied, 'I suggested it, but she declined.' The Master at once took down some sugar from a sling and mixing it in a tumbler of Ganges water held it before the

old lady saying, 'Drink.' She stared at him meaningfully for a while, then drank it without further ado. Then touching her bosom she said, 'My heart is cooled, father!' In later days, when Kshirodebala Roy, a widow from childhood, went to the Mother for initiation, she asked her, 'Dear girl, what do you eat on an *Ekadasi* day?' Kshirodebala used to eat sago at first; and then being told that it was adulterated with things that are banned for widows, she went without any food on those days. Such austerity told upon her health, and she looked emaciated. The Mother was moved on hearing her account, and she said, 'No , no, I tell you, you eat sago; this will help to tone up the system.' Later she added, 'My girl, you have practised enough of rigour; now I tell you, don't do so any more. Your body is now lean like a log of wood. If the body is destroyed with what will you undertake spiritual discipline, my dear?' Kshirodebala had her hair cropped short according to local custom. Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma, out of their sympathy for her, argued against such unreasonableness. But the Mother intervened to say, 'It is good that she has done so. If one has hair, there creeps in a sense of luxury, one has to take care of it. However that may be my daughter, you have crossed over that bridge of hair and reached here. You have reached the goal for which all that austerity was needed. Now, I tell you, don't you undertake any more austerity.' What a fine combination we get here of pity with divine outlook, and of avoidance of luxury with eagerness for the protection of the body as an instrument for spiritual endeavour! The succeeding illustrations also are replete with the same spirit.

A devout brahmin widow of Chandrakona, who was a disciple of the Mother lived with her at one time at Jayrambati. Like the widows of old she wore a white piece of cloth without any border, cropped her hair short, and did not even chew betel, leave alone wearing ornaments; and yet she served the Mother silently and cheerfully. For this service, self-control, and avoidance of

luxury the Mother loved her and waxed eloquent in her praise.

Finding the child-widow Shavasana Devi intent on rigorous fasting, the Mother said to her, 'What will you gain by hurting the body? I tell you, drink water at least.' When Surabala Devi after her widowhood proposed to eat nothing for the rest of her life but simple boiled rice and butter, the Mother said, 'If the soul hankers after any food, that should be offered to it. Else you incur a sin. The soul cries out saying, "She has deprived me of food."'

Although the Mother did not eat rice on *Ekadasi* days, she took a few *luchies*. She was heard to say, 'Call on God when the body is calmed after eating.' Her companions, Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma, also did not fast without food and water on those days. We noted earlier that under a belief that the Master could not die, the Mother did not discard fully the signs of her married life even after the passing away of her consort. Still her natural simplicity in food and dress, along with her reverence for tradition brought about an austerity that could not escape notice. Fish and meat she never tasted, bodice or jacket or any such thing she never put on, and instead of a cloth with broad and fabricated borders, she wore one with a very thin red outline.

The Mother's denunciation of child-marriage was unequivocal. There were two unmarried girls from Madras in the Nivedita School, who were of about twenty or twenty-one years of age. Referring to them the Mother said, 'Ah! How they have learnt arts and crafts. And as for our girls! The people of these wretched parts go on clamouring when a girl is hardly eight years old, "Send her to a new family! Have her married!" Alas! If Radhu had not been married, she wouldn't have come to grief so early.'

Uncle Kali married his sons Bhudev and Radharaman very early. Bhudev was tied in wedlock at the age of thirteen (May 7, 1913) and Radharaman at the age of

eleven. The Mother was then in Calcutta. When she got the intimation there, she remarked very caustically, 'He's marrying his little sons, and extracting money from me. He doesn't know that ultimately he will have to suffer.'

Knowing that in wedded lives there was a pitiable lack of self-control, she deplored that some people seemed to take the multiplication of their families as the be-all and end-all of life. In this connection she added, 'The Master suggested a controlled life after the birth of one or two children. Sense-control is a necessity. All those austerities enjoined for the widows are meant for sense-control.'

As she warned men against being lured by women, so also she cautioned women against men. To a woman she said, 'Never have any faith in men, not even if God Himself should come to you in the form of a man.' This was, of course, an extreme case. The woman concerned was beautiful and had become the owner of vast properties after her widowhood in the prime of life. On another occasion the Mother thus advised a woman devotee not to frequent monasteries or other places where holy men reside: 'Look here, my daughter! It's true that you will be going there with pious motives and devotion; but if that should affect their minds, you, too, will have to bear a part of the burden of the sin.' This, too, was an unusual case. But the trend of both the instructions is obvious.

The Mother had no literary education. But that did not curb her enthusiasm for making others learned. She educated her nieces Maku and Radhu in a general way, made them read out religious books for her, and had her letters written by them. Radhu was at a Christian school. As she was a grown-up girl according to contemporary opinion, Golap-Ma said that her attendance at school should be terminated. At this remark Radhu began to weep. But the Mother said, 'She's not quite grown up. Let her go to school. She can do immense good to others if she gets education and learns some useful arts from the

school. She has been married in a backward village. Through education she will not only improve herself, but will be able to help others.'

With the Nivedita School she had a sweet relation, and she was full of praise for the administrative capacity of Sister Nivedita. Sudhira Devi, who succeeded the Sister and dedicated her life for the bringing up of the girls in accordance with the ideals of her predecessor, earned the sincerest encomium of the Mother. Being told by a certain devotee that she was greatly worried because she had five unmarried daughters at home, the Mother advised her, 'If you can't marry them, why should you worry so much? Put them in the Nivedita School where they will learn and live well.' The woman did not act up to this advice; but the Mother's advice has its own intrinsic value.

She knew darning, embroidery, etc., and did not generally depend on others for such sundry things. She was full of appreciation when anyone brought her woollen fabrics, with patterns of temples and deities, for being hung up on her walls, or carpets, with creepers, trees, and flowers finely embroidered on them, for her to sit on. In fact, her admiration for the good qualities in others was very remarkable. Whatever appealed to her, she showed to others to heighten the estimation of the artist.

Speaking of the education of women she said one day at Koalpara that she had the greatest desire to see the girls of the village educated; but that the difficulty was about securing the right type of women as teachers. The few that were available were fashionable; and it is a human weakness to imbibe more easily the outward spruceness than the prudence of a teacher. Such a contingency would be more harmful than beneficial to a village.

She hated luxury. A woman whose husband was seriously ill, came to seek the Mother's benediction, dressed in her best trappings. The Mother asked her to bow down at a distance and dismissed her with a few sweet words. When the woman had left, the Mother remarked,

'There's such a calamity ahead of her, and she came to the Master. Whereas she should have made vows to him with sobs and tears, you noticed, how she came with perfumes and fripperies instead? Should one come to the shrine of any deity in this manner? Everything in these days looks so odd!'

In all her talks and deeds a godliness based on perfect self-discipline was what caught the eye of the most casual observer. Her life expressed itself through the rites, manners, and customs of her environment; but the touch of spirituality was unmistakable all through. After bathing in the Ganges, for instance, the Mother offered the priest there a mango, a plantain, and a pice and said, 'I give the fruits to be sure, but the fruit of the gift is yours.'

Naturally, she set her face against social non-conformity. Yet instances are not rare of her overlooking customs when a more basic need demanded it. One day, as she was given a mango and some milk and sweets, she mixed them together, and then tasting a little of it said, 'I leave it (as *prasada*) for my son', and went out for washing her hands and mouth. On her return, she found a woman devotee eating the whole stuff and saying in a tone of wounded love, 'Her sons will eat everything, while we shall starve!' The Mother was taken aback at first, but without any protest, she ordered some rice, soup of lentils, and vegetable curry, mixed all these together, tasted a little of it, and said, 'I leave it (as *prasada*) for my son.' Another woman who stood by had then the doubt in her mind, 'How could she, a brahmin woman as she is, eat twice?' As the objection was not voiced in words, the Mother's reply remained unknown. But in a similar case, another woman devotee could not help saying, 'Well, Mother, how is it that, though you are a brahmin's daughter, you have eaten rice twice and you have polluted your lips?' The Mother replied, 'I can do everything for the good of my children. No guilt is incurred thereby. And if it is *prasada* there's no fault in taking it even five times;

for *prasada* is not to be classed as ordinary food. Don't you disturb your mind with such petty questions; these things make you forget the Master. In the name of the Master, do whatever you think right, notwithstanding what others may say.'

Still we repeat that, though such events were not infrequent, every act of hers in the social sphere was above criticism. Once, at Kamarpukur, a disciple wanted to take the impression of her feet on a piece of cloth. But as widows are debarred from painting their feet with scarlet dye, the Mother dissuaded him saying, 'This is not the proper place. All people don't look upon me in the same way as you do. For instance, many from the Laha family frequent this place; in consequence I shall have to hide myself, for there will be the colour of lac-dye under the feet.' During her stay at the 'Udbodhan' a woman devotee happened to bring for her a cloth with a broad red border. The Mother accepted it with a smile and wore it, but soon put it away saying, 'How can I possibly wear it, my dear? People will say, "The wife of the Paramahamsa (Ramakrishna) wears a red-bordered cloth." Anyway, since you have brought it, I shall wear it when going to the Ganges for bath.' During her last illness, a monk came to see her at the 'Udbodhan'. The Mother was in her bed, and her head had no veil. The monk massaged her feet a little and went away. The Mother then turned to the woman attendant and said, 'I had no veil on my head; why did you not draw it down? Am I dead that you are behaving so even now?'

When the Mother was going to the Ganges for her bath, Golap-Ma advised her to apply oil to her body; but she said, 'I won't rub oil. If I do, others also will; it's not proper to go for a dip in the Ganges with the oil on.' When one day the Mother tied an amulet to Radhu's body and set apart a pice in the name of a deity, so that Radhu might recover from her sickness, a woman disciple was perplexed to see her behave thus, since the Mother could by her mere will cure Radhu without having recourse to such

means or intermediaries. The Mother explained to her, 'If any one falls ill, one can get cured by vowing things to deities. Besides, each should have his due.'

At that time (August 1911) the Mother bathed at the Raja's ghat, for Durgacharan Mukherji's ghat had not then come into existence. When returning from the Ganges, she carried some water in a small pot, a little of which she poured at the roots of the wayside banyan trees and saluted them. Once, when a devotee wanted to take her to Ranchi, she declined saying that one should not go anywhere in Chaitra (March-April). When a certain Kaviraj suggested to her, as a remedy for rheumatism, to take a piece of garlic boiled in milk, she said, 'No, my son, I shall not be able to eat garlic.' The Kaviraj argued, 'Mother, the garlic will have no smell when boiled in milk. This is an efficacious remedy for rheumatism.' The Mother still said, 'No, my son, I can't do that.' So the proposal had to be dropped.

Then we come to the Mother's social outlook and patriotism. The very topic may seem queer in this context. But people who live in society, who are nurtured by the food and air of a country, imbibe certain ideas consciously or unconsciously about society and country, which continue throughout life; and though they remain generally unno. ticed, still they make their presence felt at crucial moments- We have had some acquaintance with this side of the Mother's character in connection with the Sindhubala incident, the agitation for boycott of foreign goods, and the relief of the poor and the distressed. We shall now briefly refer to a few more incidents.

A disciple of the Mother, who was noted for his quiet life and religious temperament, was unnecessarily harassed by the police. One day, just as he stepped out of his chapel, he was arrested and whisked away; he was not allowed time even to take a little *prasada* or to drink a glass of water. When the Mother heard of this, she said sorrowfully, 'Just see, how iniquitous the English are!

My honest boy! He has been oppressed for no reason whatsoever, and he has not been allowed to take a little of the Master's *prasada*. Can the rule of the English last?'

During the First World War, when there was a scarcity of cloth in the country, and the Koalpara Ashrama was busy plying its spinning wheels and looms, the Mother said encouragingly, 'Bring me a spinning wheel; I shall also spin.' When Swami Jnanananda was under police vigilance and was compelled to live in Dr. Aghorenath Ghosh's house at Katihar, he came to learn that the Mother was seriously ill at Koalpara and he visited her there. Fearing that his host, the doctor, who was a government servant, might be implicated by the police for this absence of the Swami, all at Koalpara advised Jnanananda to leave soon; but the Mother was unwilling to part from him so soon. At last she was prevailed upon to let him go; but at the same time she prayed for the eradication of that oppressive system. In 1913, when many people lost their all in the Damodar flood, the Mother, told one of her disciples, 'My boy, do good to the world.' At the Mother's behest the disciple girded up his loins for the service of the God in the form of suffering humanity and went to the Mother to take leave of her. On entering the room he was astounded to hear her saying to herself, 'Only money, money, money!', for he thought that the Mother had read his thoughts, which then centred round the problem of collecting funds for the service of the afflicted. The Mother perhaps understood the disciple's perplexity and explained, 'No, my son, money also is a necessity. Look at Kali, for instance; he only talks of money.' The Mother encouraged the members of the Ramakrishna Math to engage in social service. One day in 1916, she was resting at the house of Sri Sureshwar Sen at Vishnupur on her way to Calcutta when on that very day Brahmachari Varada arrived there to purchase rice for distribution among the famine-stricken people near about Jayrambati. His plan was to carry the rice in bullock-

carts which had brought the Mother and her party to Vishnupur. Now, finding the Brahmachari there, Radhu wanted him to accompany the party to Calcutta; but the Mother silenced her saying, 'So many people will have food only after he carries the rice from here; so many lives depend on him — have you any idea of that?' So Radhu was overruled, and Varada returned to Jayrambati.

The Mother was always busy, and liked to see others equally so. One evening Brahmachari Gopesh saw the Mother kneading some wheat flour on the verandah of Nalini Devi's house. At that time there was no lack of hands to give her relief from such jobs in her old age. And so the Brahmachari found no sense in the Mother's busying herself in this way. Accordingly, he asked her for the reason, whereupon she said, 'My son, it's good to be diligent.' And then she added solemnly after a little pause, 'Bless me so that I may work as long as I live.'

She kept herself constantly busy. At Jayrambati she tirelessly went through her daily routine. Looking to the comforts of the devotees, dressing vegetables in the morning for about two hours, taking out stores for the kitchen, arranging for the worship and then worshipping with her own hands, distributing the *prasada*, making at least a hundred betel rolls, kneading flour and preparing *chapati* and *luchi*, boiling milk, cleaning lamps, and such other works followed one another without intermission and without anybody else's help, as if they were duty alone. She used to say, 'On the one hand, the body is becoming weaker, and on the other, work is increasing.' During the rainy season one day the inmates of the 'Udbodhan' spread their wet clothes in the sun and then went about their own works or rested in their rooms below, when suddenly it began to rain and the Mother came out to take the clothes away. In spite of her rheumatism, she had to stand pretty long on the wet verandah, taking the clothes one by one, rinsing them and spreading them carefully to dry in a room. When somebody protested and reminded

her of her rheumatism, she simply said, 'Presently I shall stop, my boy; just a little remains to be done.'

Comin to know that certain monks were going out for austerity, Swami Parameshwarananda told the Mother, 'It doesn't seem good to continue in the midst of these works. Kindly permit me also to go out for austerity.' The Mother replied, 'How strangely you speak, my boy! You are doing my work, the Master's work. Is this anything less than austerity?'

At Banaras, the Mother instructed Swami Shantananda, 'Do the Master's work and undergo spiritual discipline. When one does some work, the mind remains free from vain thoughts. When one stays alone one may be subject to various thoughts.' Of course, she permitted suitable persons to undertake austerity; but here we are dealing with incidents of a different category.

Even trifling matters had a due share of her attention, and she could not tolerate disorderliness. One day at Jayrambati, a woman happened to cast away carelessly a broom after cleaning the courtyard. Noticing this the Mother told her that even such an insignificant thing as a sweeping mop should have the consideration due to it, that the smallest work should be done with proper attention and that nothing should be neglected as of no consequence.

She detested waste and extravagance. One day a servant brought some custard apples from Balaram Babu's house in a cheap wicker basket and having deposited the fruits in the shrine-room asked the monks below as to what he should do with the basket. Somebody said, 'What purpose will it serve? Throw it out on the road.' The Mother heard this from above and going to the verandah overhanging the road, she found it to be serviceable. She, therefore, condemned this wastefulness, and had the basket brought and washed for some future use.

Rammay used to go to Jayrambati from Badanganj every Saturday. Hence if any good food came to the Mother's house, she kept apart a share of it for him. One

day somebody prepared some delicious *kichudi* with plenty of ghee and other costly ingredients. When Rammay came, she gave him a great quantity of it. As he could not do full justice to it, he ate as much as he could and then wanted to throw away the rest. But the Mother said, 'My boy, don't throw away such good stuff', and directed him to call in a girl of the Sadagopa caste from a neighbouring house, who came and carried away the remaining food with great delight. Then the Mother said, 'Each should have his due. What men can eat shouldn't be wasted on cattle; what cattle can eat shouldn't be thrown away to dogs; what cattle and dogs can't eat can be thrown into ponds for the fish — nothing should be wasted.' As for herself, she kept even such useless stuff as waste vegetables and fruit peels for cattle.

Prone to follow tradition as human society is, there crop up strange problems for it which refuse to be fitted into any existing pattern, and hence society reacts either by ignoring or by suppressing them. But on the transparent hearts of supermen is reflected even under such circumstances a new light by which society is able to discover fresh avenues of approach to such baffling situations. In front of the Mother's house in Calcutta, there lived a man with his paramour. When the woman fell ill, the man tended her with the fullest care, and the Mother once said in praise of this man, 'How splendidly he attends on her, my dear! I never saw the like of it. This is real service, this is real love.' The person spoken to kept silent before the Mother, though she entertained the greatest repugnance for the pair and thought, 'Fancy, that there can be any such thing as service for a paramour!' It is naturally difficult for ordinary women to appreciate readily this catholicity of the Mother.

Up till now we have noticed the Mother in the midst of serene and solemn surroundings. But we should not conclude that there was no girlish simplicity or feminine joviality in her. In fact, her homeliness and conviviality

screened off her greatness so often that those who came in contact with her, thought of her more as a near and dear one than as one who was superhuman. Where others would resort to blustering for concealing their ignorance or ineptitude, the Mother readily admitted her shortcoming or inability to the extent of making herself the laughing-stock of all and joining heartily in the resulting hilarity.

During an early visit to Calcutta she found on entering a bath-room and opening a tap that a hissing sound issued out of the water pipe. This scared her away and she told others that some snake had entered into the pipe. At this, her hearers burst out laughing, for it it a common experience to the Calcutta people that when the water supply is cut off for some time, air enters into the pipes, and when the supply is resumed, the air pressed out by the water produces a hissing sound. Nothing abashed by that laugh at her expense, the Mother used to recount the incident to her disciples in later days and make fun of her own rural simplicity.

The hurricane lantern that the Mother had at Jayrambati was of an old pattern with some wire loops around to protect the chimney. As the Mother used the lantern carefully, the chimney had a long life. But to take it out of the encircling wires was difficult for her and she said innocently, 'There's too much of complicated mechanism; I can't take it out.' In order to praise the intelligence of a Calcutta girl she said, 'The daughter-in-law of such a family can wind a timepiece!', as though that was a very dexterous job. Mathematics perplexed the Master, and machinery puzzled the Mother. This peculiar attitude to science and its achievements of these twin souls, who incarnated to lead the modern world out of its psychological chaos, is worth serious notice.

Let us now look at her knowledge of conjugal relationship. One day her niece Radhu complained to her that her husband Manmatha had given her a slap. When the Mother inquired about the cause, Radhu said that she

had thrown a towel at Manmatha. At this, the Mother seemed to side with Radhu and find fault with Manmatha's conduct. But a woman devotee present there argued that if Radhu had flung the towel at her husband, it was nothing unnatural for him to retaliate with a slap. That changed the Mother's mood, who said, 'Is that really so, my daughter-in-law? Do you have such altercations? I had no such problem with the Master, and hence I have no experience.' And to Radhu she said, 'Listen! Now then, it is you who are to blame — that's what the daughter-in-law here says.'

Often enough she deliberately played the little girl with others. Though she had many attendants, she importuned a boy saying, 'Do pluck some flowers for me, my son — the fine, good boy that you are!' The boy refused again and again; and yet the Mother would not give in. At last she got the flowers plucked by him. She had many women disciples near at hand to attend to her personal needs, but she told an old village woman, 'My daughter, do massage my feet a little; there's a gnawing pain there.' The old woman would not agree under the plea that she had been working the whole day, and that there could be no question of massaging at that late hour in the night when her fatigued body wanted rest. The Mother still persisted, 'Do rub it with your hand a little; tell me, what else you can do now, my good girl!' The woman had to yield at last.

Rammay, then a young boy reading at Badanganj, came to the Mother's house on Saturdays, and went back on Mondays, spending two days there in doing all kinds of petty works for the Mother. The Mother initiated him and loved him very much. One day there were many devotees present at the house. The Mother and Rammay sat near the hearth preparing *chapatis* on small wood pieces with rolling-pins, while Nalini Devi baked them. Rammay could roll three pieces at a time and turn them round with the rolling-pin itself. The work progressed thus when Nalini

suddenly remarked, 'Aunt, Rammay's *chapatis* are getting better inflated than yours.' Like a petulant girl the Mother at once pushed off the rolling pin and the flat wood piece and said, 'Then I won't roll any more; let him do it all. I have grown old in the work, and he is just a suckling, from whose throat milk spurts out if one but presses it. Fancy, that he can roll better than I do!' Rammay also pushed off his rolling pieces and said, 'Mother, I won't roll unless you also do so.' And to Nalini he said, 'How could you know which is mine and which Mother's?,' The Mother then resumed her work.

There was no lack of fun either. One day Nivedita and Christine came to her. The former had mastered a few Bengali words with the help of which she said, 'Mother divine, you are our Kali.' Christine also repeated the same idea in English. Hearing them, the Mother said with a simper, 'No, my dears, I can't become Kali or any such deity. In that case I shall have to keep my tongue protruded.' When her words were interpreted to Nivedita and Christine, they said, 'The Mother need not undergo that trouble at all; we look upon her as our Mother. And Sri Ramakrishna is our Siva.' That being explained to the Mother, she tittered and said, 'That much can somehow be seen to.'

The Mother had fever at Jayrambati, and, therefore, while drinking sago she told the disciples, 'How is it, my dears, you seem to have no attraction for the *prasada* today.' On another day, as she sat inside uncle Prasanna's house with her legs hanging down, Prakash Maharaj went in and after prostrating himself said, 'Mother, don't make me ramble about any more.' The Mother replied, 'You could forget me and wander about so long, and should I not now make you wander a little more?'

The Mother might make fun; but when others ridiculed anybody for his foolishness, she did not unnecessarily add to his embarrassment by joining in the giggle; but rather she would show sympathy. During her last stay

at Jayrambati, some devotees from Ranchi came with many fruits for her. There sat by her a widow named Bhavini Devi who was distantly related to her as a cousin, and as such she was known to the devotees as aunt Bhavini. The aunt's old mother was then ill and hence the Mother had given the aunt earlier two pomegranates for her mother. Later came the fruits from Ranchi, out of which the aunt expected a good share. And so she said with a deep sigh, 'Alas! At first it was I who was proposed to be married to Paramahamsa Deva (Ramakrishna). My father did not wed me then to him thinking that he was mad. If the wedding had taken place, all these things would have entered my house.' This made all laugh. There was a smile on the Mother's lips but it did not denote ridicule but rather friendship. She said to the aunt, 'Why, then, take whatever you want.' And to her attendant she said, 'O Hari, put aside something for the Master and then give some more papaws, pomegranates and other fruits to Bhavini.' To the aunt she said, 'Don't you give the papaws to your mother to eat; they are rather bad for her.'

Her ideas of money and ornaments differed somewhat from the Master's. As soon as these came to her hands she touched them to her head. If anybody happened to remind her of the Master's very different treatment of them she used to reply without any subterfuge or prevarication, and yet in words full of meaning, 'To compare me to the Master! My son, I am after all a woman! The Master himself went so far as to make me wear golden ornaments.' She had some regard for precious metals as symbols of the goddess of good luck. But she had no attachment for them. Once, before starting for Jayrambati from Calcutta, the Mother gave her attendant a ten rupee note for purchasing a wrapper for a poor woman in the village. The cloth cost two and a half rupees, so that the attendant wanted to return to the Mother the balance of seven and a half rupees. But she refused saying that she had given only a

five-rupee note. The attendant then wanted to ascertain how many five-rupee and how many ten-rupee notes she had in her box. The Mother did not remember. Then he asked, 'Do you at least remember how much money you had in all?' 'No,' replied the Mother. At last the attendant said, 'Now you can well realize the truth. Why should I be returning more? And where can I get the extra amount?' Only when the matter was thus pushed home to her, did she agree to accept the money.

This non-attachment was an inborn virtue. The Master then lived at Dakshineswar. Desiring that some provision for the maintenance of the Mother should be made, he arranged for a sum of two hundred rupees to be paid to the Mother. She tied it up in a piece of cloth and put it by in an earthen vessel meant for storing spices. The Master, coming to know of this, asked her, 'Is it wise to keep money thus?' Referring to this incident the Mother said smilingly to a disciple, 'And now, by his will, what a lot of money is flowing in and out!' In fact, the Mother was wholly a disinterested witness of the inflow and outflow of money. In the beginning she did not even touch the money offered by the devotees at her feet; Golap-Ma and others who happened to be near at hand looked after all that. Subsequently when for the good of this world, her mind was tied by divine ordinance to this plane through Radhu, and her household became larger, she was forced to take more active interest in the day-to-day management. Even during the first years of this new situation her brothers received all the money that came by postal money orders and she only fixed her thumb impression on the receipts when the occasion demanded it. Still later, one of her attendants wrote the Mother's name, while she put the thumb impression. She then picked up the amount as a whole without counting or examining the genuineness of the coins and deposited the sum in a box. She did not like giving too much of attention to money, saying as she did, 'The jingling of coins lures the minds

of poor people.' The money was kept in an ordinary box and drawn out of it without any account for receipt or disbursement. She used to hand over the key to her attendant and ask him to take out the necessary sum; or she herself opened it and said, 'Here it is, take it.' When any balance was returned after shopping, she kept it in the box without counting. Sometimes she herself purchased some vegetables from the mother of Satish Samui who came to her door with them. After the purchase, she took out a handful of coins and held them before the woman, so that she might count out her due. Sometimes there was an over-payment which the woman discovered after reaching home, and came back to return.

But this should not be construed to mean that the Mother was either a spendthrift or that she lacked worldly wisdom. Perfect indifference to mundane affairs might be ingrained in her; but she who had accepted the responsible duty of leading others in all walks of life could not afford to be wholly oblivious of worldly trends. Besides, after the construction of a separate home for herself at Jayrambati, she, as the sole mistress, had to pay more attention to everything concerning it.

The village committee fixed a tax of four rupees per annum on the new house. The tax for the first year was paid without her knowledge when she was in Calcutta. When the village watchman came to collect the tax for the second year, she instructed the attendant not to pay, but to try to get an exemption by applying to the village council. The attendant was a little surprised at this earnestness in the Mother for saving such a paltry sum, though he dared not speak out his mind. But in due course she herself explained, 'I am here now and I may be able to afford to pay the tax; but in the future there may be some monk or Brahmachari residing here, who may have to maintain himself by begging. Where will he get the money for paying the tax?' Howsoever that may be, the President of the council directed the tax to be paid for the second

year, as it was too late to grant exemption, assuring them at the same time that he would stop the levy from the third year. The gentleman kept his promise.

When Swami Jnanananda was at Jayrambati, he tried to procure pure milk even at a high cost. To the milkman he used to say, 'You can charge as high as a rupee for thirty-two pounds. But I want pure milk.' Hearing this the Mother said, 'What is this you are saying, Jnan? Here milk is available at a pice for a pound so that poor people also can drink it; and you are raising the rate thus! As for a milkman, it's his habit to mix water with the milk. If you raise the rate he will be tempted to mix more water for earning more money.' When the Swami lived at the Ashrama at Navasan, he procured one day some of his 'pure milk' at an exorbitant rate, for the Mother's house at Jayrambati. Brahmachari Gopesh went with the milk; but on the way, he found to his horror that there was a little fish in it. He then thought that as the milk could not be offered to the Master, he might as well throw it away. But on second thought he preferred to carry it to the Mother and abide by her decision. The Mother was told everything, but at the suggestion of throwing it away she said, 'Why should you waste it? If it can't be offered to the Master, there are the children who can drink it.'

One day a woman came to sell blankets at the 'Udbodhan', and Nalini Devi fell to chaffering with her. The woman demanded a rupee and four annas, whereas Nalini would not agree to more than a rupee. This went on for a pretty long time, when the Mother said to Nalini, 'You have been higgling for such a long time for a petty sum of four annas! Fie! She moves from door to door with the load on her head in the hope of earning a little money; and here you detain her so long for a trifling sum! Besides, what need have you of a blanket? You have everything and still you are out to buy one! It would have been better if one were given to my daughter-in-law (meaning her disciple Kshirodebala, who was there). She does not use anything

but blankets; of these, too, she has but one. Though she has to manage with that single blanket even in these cold days, still she doesn't beg from anyone.' Kshirodebala was moved to tears to think that the Mother kept herself so well- informed.

As vegetables were not easily available at Jayrambati, Satish Samui's mother procured them from other places and sold them to the Mother at prohibitive rates. When the Mother's attention was drawn to this she said simply, 'She is mindful of my needs; in times of difficulty we can get our requirements from her just for the asking. She is my store-keeper.'

The Holy Mother was the mother of all; her acts and advice were for all. Hence, though she was full of the spirit of renunciation in personal life, she asked her house-holder disciples to earn money and accumulate it. We have already referred to Surendranath Gupta. There is also the instance of Prabodhchandra Chatterji, the headmaster of the Badanganj High School, who once came to the Mother with a good supply of fruits, sweets, and vegetables at a considerable cost. At this the Mother scolded him saying, 'Why did you spend so much money? You have your wife and children. You should lay by something for them. I am not in any want, thanks to the Master's grace.' This made Prabodhchandra sad, since he thought, 'Have I no right to serve her just because I am poor?' The Mother read his mind and said, 'What you have to consider, my boy, is that if you put by something, there will be some provision for your family and the future. Besides, you will be able to serve the holy men too. If you have nothing, what will you give to the holy men, my dear?' When he once proposed to buy a horse, the Holy Mother said, 'No, my son, don't! Buy a treadle-car (bicycle) instead.'

Now we turn to the Mother's social dealings. Sri Sajani Roy, a nephew of Sambhu Roy, a landholder of Jibta, was appointed in the charitable homoeopathic dispensary

attached to the Mother's house, as a salaried physician. At the time of his initiation he offered two rupees at the Mother's feet, who, however, refused this, though she used to gladly accept the greens and vegetables that he brought from his garden. The Mother realized that this behaviour appeared to her attendant as an enigma; and hence she explained the matter thus on that very evening, 'Mark you, I didn't keep Sajani's money. That he brings from his own garden certain things is altogether a different matter. If the people at his home come to know of our acceptance of money, they will be scared, lest I should ultimately lay my hands on their property. They are very worldly-minded people! They will naturally be suspicious.'

Brahmachari Gopesh while at Jayrambati, came to know that the devotees of Dacca had published an appeal for collecting one thousand and five hundred rupees to defray the expenses of the Mother's visit to East Bengal. Without mentioning the appeal for subscription, Gopesh casually asked her whether she was planning to go to East Bengal. The Mother replied, 'How can I say, my son? The Master knows where I shall go.' Then Gopesh informed her in a general way that the devotees of Dacca were making efforts to take her there. At this the Mother said, 'They will raise some money, to be sure!' After a pause she continued, 'They always have maggots in their brains. Look here, for instance, there's a new craze for the Master.'

When two Brahmacharis from Garbeta came to Jayrambati, the Mother gathered from them that they were going round collecting money from the big villages in the country-side. She at once cautioned them saying, 'Mind you, my boys, don't collect any money from this side in the Master's name, be it for a home of service or any other purpose. You can do as you like in a town or in far-off places.'

Sri Lalit Chatterji was present at Jayrambati during the ceremonial opening of the Mother's new house. Being enthusiastic about opening a charitable dispensary

and a free school there, he explained to the Mother, 'Mother, if an appeal is issued in your name to the devotees, the poor people will be immensely benefited.' Though the Mother disliked such a method of raising funds, she could not reject the proposal forthwith out of consideration for the gentleman's susceptibility. Just then Brahmachari Rupachaitanya (Hemendra) came there and condemned the idea with all the vehemence he could command. The Mother heaved a sigh of relief and told Brahmachari Rashbehari afterwards, 'Methinks he saved me like my Yogin (Swami Yogananda). Fie! For shame! To beg for money!' Subsequently Lalit Chatterji himself met the expenses for the dispensary.

Next we come to the Mother's courtesy. A young man of the Roy family of Jibta came to Jayrambati on some business at about two o'clock in the afternoon, and finding Rammay and others, who were of the same age and his old acquaintances, he sat in the Mother's outer house to have a chat. The Mother somehow coming to know of his presence, lighted the hearth and sat down to prepare a little *halva* with semolina. When Rammay protested 'Mother, he has not come to you; he is of our age and has come to confabulate. Why need you take so much trouble for him?' The Mother replied, 'How can that be so, my boy? They are our landlords, our rulers. We have to do something for them.'

The language used by the Mother and the method of her instruction had their own distinctiveness. When talking to the people of Calcutta, she adopted their vocabulary; but with her relative she talked in her native dialect. But the two forms of words got mixed up at times, and the rural accents were often easily discernible. Every word she spoke was soft and sweet. Instead of ordering a disciple to do this or that she would say, for instance, 'My boy, won't it be better to have it so?' But for the good of very young disciples she might often use such expressions as, 'I say, you do this.' At times she

lingered on some words in order to emphasize them. One day, as Bibhuti Babu was returning from Jayrambati it rained heavily and this made the Mother anxious for the whole day. When Bibhuti Babu next visited Jayrambati she said, 'So you went away. But it began to rain; and I thought my Bibhuti must be—crossing the river by—now.' She interjected charming proverbs into her talks, thus making them all the more impressive. Sri Akshay Kumar Sen, the composer of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*—in epic style, came to her one day and called her, 'Mother', to which the Mother replied, 'Yes, my son.' The poet then said, 'Mother, I called you "Mother", and you responded saying, "Yes." What more fear need I have?' The Mother corrected him saying, 'No, my boy, don't you speak thus. "He that is diffident wins in the end."' One day the Mother was explaining to a woman devotee, that since human gifts do not last long, one should not beg from men, nay, not even from one's father or one's husband. Then she added, 'When the Master gives, it overflows all limits. The Master's gifts know no limitation. "He that begs gets nothing, and he that begs not, gets everything."' In connection with Nivedita's death she said one day. 'He that is a great soul, for him cries the inmost soul.'

In addition to the command of such pregnant proverbs she chose and used her words with such skill, that, though they were simple, they always revealed a cultured and thoughtful mind. After the conclusion of the First World War, Jatindranath Ghosh one day tried to explain to her the fourteen clauses of peace as adumbrated by President Wilson of the U.S.A. After hearing some of these the Mother commented, 'Their protestation is only lip-deep (*mukhastha*, meaning memorized or resting on lips).' As he did not seem to have grasped the meaning, she elaborated her point thus: 'If it issued from their hearts (*antahstha*), it would mean a world of difference.'

And there were the apt analogies. In order to explain the idea that God-realization can come through His grace

alone, though spiritual discipline has its own worth inasmuch as it purifies the mind, she said, 'His grace alone avails. Yet one must practise meditation and *japa*. The impurities of the mind are removed thereby. As the fragrance of the flower comes out when it is moved about, or that of the sandal issues forth when it is rubbed, so also enlightenment dawns when one goes on thinking on God. By transcending desires, one can get it at once.' Coming to learn once of the misunderstanding between two persons, she said, 'There are times when everything has to be endured. At times (i.e., before sacrificing to gods) you have to offer flowers even at the hoofs of goats.' There were many devotees who regretted that though they had a rare guru like her, they had no enlightenment. She consoled such people thus, 'Whatever I had to give, I gave once for all at that very time (of initiation). But if you want immediate peace, you must take recourse to spiritual discipline; otherwise you will get it after death.' To explain the difference between this acquisition of grace and becoming conscious about the acquisition, she said to a devotee, 'Suppose, my son, that you are asleep on a cot, and somebody has carried you along with your cot. Will you be conscious of this fact just after awaking? Or will you realize that you have reached a new place only after fully shaking off your drowsiness?'

Extremely gentle by nature as the Mother was, she would not hurt anybody's feelings, and such was her nature that where people magnified others' faults, she took notice of the little bits of merit that there might be and waxed eloquent in recommending these to others. The devotees therefore, got nothing but blessing from her. A devotee brought some mangoes to the Mother's house in Calcutta depending on the recommendation of the dealer and without tasting them, since he thought it improper to eat from anything meant for the deities before they were actually offered to them. When they sat for meal at noon and *prasada*, including the mangoes, was served, none could

eat the fruits as they were extremely sour. None the less, the Mother tasted one of them and said, 'No, it is a good enough fruit with a mixture of sweet and sour tastes.' The Mother indeed had a bias for sour things; but that was not the only cause for her praisingi n this instance; the real motive was to save the devotee from embarrassment. Indeed, whenever the sweetmeats brought by the devotees proved to be bad, she tasted one or two by way of encouragement.

Whatever she had, she distributed with a free hand among the devotees. The *prasada* that was set apart for her breakfast, she used to give away to the devotees. And if she herself began distributing the *prasada*, then even the little syrup of sugar-candy that she had for her morning drink, would be exhausted or every little of it would be left over for her use.

Though she had no education in the modern sense of the term, yet her manners, and conversation were so dignified, liberal, instructive, and charming that a cultured foreign woman like Sister Nivedita once wrote about her: "To me it has always appeared that she is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an old order, or the beginning of a new? In her one sees realized that wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of woman may attain. And yet, to myself the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood. I have never known her hesitate to give utterance to large and generous judgement, however new or complex might be the question put before her. Her life is one long stillness of prayer. Her whole experience is of theocratic civilization. Yet she rises to the height of every situation. Is she ortured by the perversity of any about her? The only sign is a strange quiet and intensity that comes upon her. Does one carry to her some perplexity or mortification born of social developments beyond her ken? With unerring intuition she goes straight to the heart of the matter, and

sets the questioner in the true attitude to the difficulty." (*The Master as I saw Him*, p. 147)

We shall now give a brief account of the daily routine of her life. Her habit of leaving the bed in the small hours of the night persisted throughout her life. At 3 a.m. she woke up with the names of the deities on her lips and the first thing for her to do was to have a look at the Master's picture. After attending to her personal cleanliness, she woke up the Master and then sat for *japa*. This routine she followed even in ill health, though at times when the body appeared too weak, she lay down again after washing her mouth. About early rising she said, 'Wherever I might happen to be, when it struck three at night, I felt as though somebody blew a flute near my ears.' After arranging flowers, *bel* leaves, and fruits for the Master with her own hands, she sat down for worship at about nine o'clock. This would be over in an hour. Then she distributed the *prasada* for all on *sal* leaves. During the closing years of her life, the women devotees at the 'Udbodhan' helped her, and the monks performed the worship. If any one took too much time for worship and chanting of hymns, she expressed her disapproval saying, 'After finishing the offering of food, let him chant the hymns as long as he can. What's this? People don't get their breakfast, it becomes late.' She did all her duties quickly, diligently, efficiently, and in due time, and she expected others also to do likewise.

It struck two before her lunch was finished. Then she rested awhile. But that was also the time when the women devotees freed from household duties found opportunity to visit the Mother. The Mother talked with them as she lay on her bed. She got up at about 3-30 p.m., changed her clothes and offered light refreshment to the Master. Then she sat for *japa*, and talked with the women devotees at intervals. The men came at about 5-30 p.m., when the women devotees moved away to another room. The Mother, with a wrapper all over her body and her feet dangling from the cot on which she sat, accepted the obeisance of

her sons. If any one asked her, 'How are you, Mother?' she would indicate by a motion of her head that she was well, or say so gently in a low tone which was communicated more loudly, if it were necessary, by another who stood by her. If any devotee had any special problem, he waited till the last. If he happened to be intimately known, the Mother would answer him directly, but if a new-comer, she would take another's help. Before dusk, she would again sit for *japa* which would continue till after nightfall. Then she would be down on the floor till the Master was served with his night-offerings. As she lay there, some woman disciple would step in to massage her feet with oil. She usually retired to bed at about 11 p.m. after food.

She had some speciality about her food. Among greens she liked gram leaves and radish leaves. When she lost appetite after any attack of malaria, she was given radish leaves. She liked brinjals and other vegetables fried in oil with a thin coating of pasted lentils, or boiled potatoes. On winter mornings, the Master was often offered these things along with fried-rice and fried pulses. She also had a taste for sweet balls made out of *mug* or lentils. As she suffered from dysentery, Kaviraj Durgaprasad Sen prescribed for her *amrul* leaves, which she often ate in her closing days, and which Swami Premananda sent her from the Belur Math whenever he found an opportunity. Among the different varieties of *sandesh* (dry sweetmeats from cheese) she liked *ratabi* and among cakes *rasapulis*. In the morning she drank a little of the syrup of sugar-candy. Among mangoes she preferred those which had a bit of sourness rather than those that were all sweet, as for instance, *Pearafuli*, *Langra*, and *Alfonso*. Because she was rheumatic she did not take much of curds. On medical advice she drank milk twice daily. Each time she was given a pound of milk, half of which she drank, and left the other half with rice mixed with it as *prasada* for her children who came to see her. In the afternoon she took nothing but betels and water. Her night meal consisted of

two or three *luchis*, a little vegetable, and milk. She cleaned her teeth four times a day with a powder made of tobacco and cocoanut leaves burnt together.

So long as the Mother lived with her brothers' families at Jayrambati, she used to dress vegetables, sitting on the verandah, from seven in the morning till nine. The devotees sat by her then and talked while helping her with cleaning and sorting the greens and vegetables. After bath, she sat for worship at about nine o'clock and then distributed *prasada* among the devotees. They generally got fried-rice, *halva*, and sweets, to which were often added fruits and roots brought by themselves. This over, she entered the kitchen to relieve the cook for her breakfast. In curries she used salt, chilli, and spices very sparingly, as that accorded with the Master's taste.

Whenever a devotee went inside to bow down before her, she gave him a sweetmeat with a glass of water and at least two rolls of betel. Whatever the devotees brought from Calcutta or other places for her, she accepted with readiness and subsequently distributed these among the devotees as though they were meant for themselves only. The village people, too, came to pay their respects to their 'grandmother', and in return got handfuls of the good things brought from afar. Whenever Swami Saradananda and Krishnabhavini Devi, wife of the Master's devotee Balaram Babu, sent any good thing, she set apart the first shares for Simhavahini, Dharma, and other village deities. Her relatives and disciples also got their shares. Again, if any devotee happened to be absent, she kept his share reserved for him. During a festival some cakes were prepared in the Mother's house, some of which she kept away for Bibhuti Ghosh who used to come there regularly. But for some reason, he could not turn up at the expected time; nevertheless the Mother went on placing the cakes over the fire every day to keep them fresh, and every time she did so, she said, 'May be, he'll come tomorrow; if he does, then I shall be sorry to think, "Alas, he could not

get it to eat!"' Thus when after four days Bibhuti went to the Mother's house he found his own share still intact.

In the new house at Jayrambati, the tenor of her life was almost the same; any difference that was noticeable was owing to her old age and weakness. At that time she had to cut down her activity and spend more time in bed. But even so, her habit helped her to carry on her *japa* as usual. When the sun went up in the morning she came out, drank a little medicated water and then sat for dressing vegetables, talking the while with her disciples. At about nine o'clock, she sponged her body with tepid water and worshipped the Master and the child Krishna. Then she initiated any candidate that might be there. After that she distributed the *prasada* and supervised the kitchen. Then she prepared two hundred betel rolls in the manner which the Master had taught her. On some days the mail was read out at this time, and the Mother gave orally the answer to each letter, which the attendant then put down in writing. When the cooking was over, she invited the Master to his meal in the kitchen. After that she sat down for food with the attendants. As she suffered from biliousness which produced a burning sensation all over the body, she had a liking for a soup of black lentils. Here also she mixed some rice with milk, just as at the 'Udbodhan', for the devotees to eat as *prasada*. At about three in the afternoon she washed her hands and feet and sat down for dressing vegetables, during which time the village women gathered round her and poured forth the tales of their weal and woe. There was a brahmin woman cook; still the Mother cooked a few dishes with her own hands for her children, which she herself served. If on any day the daily mail could not be dealt with in the morning, it was taken up in the evening. At 9 p.m. food was offered to the Master by the Mother herself; or if she could not, through indisposition or illness, by somebody else. She could retire only at eleven o'clock after providing for the comforts of all.

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VALEDICTION

The Mother was at Jayrambati. The devotees decided to celebrate her birthday on December 13, 1919. To see the Mother on that auspicious occasion many devotees gathered there, while others sent offerings of clothes, flowers, fruits, and sweets. Owing to indisposition, she sponged her body with tepid water and wore the cloth sent by Swami Saradananda. When she had finished worshipping the Master, the devotees put vermilion and sandal-paste on her forehead and garlands round her neck. She sat there on her cot with her legs down, and the devotees came in one by one to worship her feet. It was not her custom to sit for her meal before her sons had finished theirs; but today she made an exception. At the request of all, she partook of the *prasada* after offerings had been made to the Master. Then the devotees and villagers were served with the *prasada*.

For some time the Mother had not been in good health. The strain of the birthday celebration brought about a relapse of the fever. At first all thought that it was her usual ailment which would soon yield to local treatment. But in spite of all that local physicians could do, the fever recurred intermittently and this made her extremely weak. It was noticed then that even a little temperature brought about complete prostration. Notwithstanding this, the Mother kept on initiating people during the intervals of the disease. As the devotees came from distant parts with great hopes, the Mother could not disappoint them even though such continuous strain drained away quickly her diminishing vitality.

Matters soon came to such a pass that no further reliance could be placed on local treatment and information had to be sent to Swami Saradananda, who, however, was then at Banaras in connection with some important work; and, as we have already mentioned, the Mother was loth to go the 'Udbodhan' in his absence. To add to

the difficulty of the situation, the Swami had to hurry to Bhuvaneshwar just after his return from Banaras. When he next came to Calcutta, he realized that the Mother's condition could brook no delay, and he, therefore, promptly sent Swami Atmaprakashananda with two others to Jayrambati to take the Mother to Calcutta. The Mother readily consented to accompany them, and it was settled that at ten o'clock on Tuesday, February 24, the Mother would start for Calcutta with Radhu, Radhu's mother, Maku, Nalini Devi, the widow of Navasan and Brahmachari Varada.

The Mother was then so weak that when she went to the chapel of Simhavahini two days before the day of starting, she became absolutely exhausted and said later, 'It made me perspire like one on one's death-bed.' On the day of journey, she fell down on the landing steps of the tank (Punya-pukur) behind the house. The arrangement was that the Mother and Radhu would travel by two palanquins, while others would walk up to the Amodar and get into bullock-carts on the other side of the river. But Radhu refused to get into one of the palanquins, which the Mother allotted to Maku and her child without further ado. Early in the morning of the appointed day all left for Vishnupur except the Mother and Maku. The Mother got ready to start after finishing the Master's worship. And then the villagers gathered round her and said with tearful eyes, 'Come back soon after recovery. Don't you forget us for long.' 'Everything is in the Master's keeping;' replied the Mother, 'can I really forget you?' And she wrapped the Master's photograph in a piece of cloth, put it in a box, made a last salutation, and stood up to start. Crossing the outer gate, she saluted with folded hands in the names of Simhavahini and other village deities and walked slowly westward by the houses of her brothers. She would get into the palanquin after crossing the bounds of the village, as out of respect for the village deities she did not use any vehicle within its limits. Uncle Prasanna's

wife was standing there at their door with a pot of water and a basin to wash the Mother's feet when she sat in the palanquin. The Mother said to her, 'You need not carry the water; hand over these things to Hari (Hariprema-nanda); he will wash my feet.' The aunt obeyed and went in to get a glass of water, some sweets, and some pasted betel, with which she proceeded towards the Aher, the irrigation tank of the village. The Mother saluted the deity Yatra-siddhi-raya at Ghoshpara and turning back saluted the village of her nativity. Then she sat in the palanquin, when Hari washed her feet and the aunt handed over the sweets, the glass of water, and betel. The Mother took all these, and gave one of her cotton wrappers to Hari, as a memento, saying, 'Hari, keep this.'

Varada moved along on a bicycle by the Mother's side, and he intended to proceed thus to Vishnupur. They went westward while the villagers looked on with wet eyes. As the river could not be forded at the usual place because of the flood there at the time, their way lay through Shihar, which meant some two or three additional miles. At Shihar the palanquin was stopped by the Mother, who then washed her hands and feet and went to bow down to Shanti-natha (Siva) at His temple, where she made an offering of some sweets, sugar, and molasses. As many boys and girls had gathered there, the Mother distributed some of the *prasada* among them as also to Maku and others, tasted a little herself, and the rest she kept aside in her hem for Radhu. When they reached Koalpara it was past eleven o'clock.

As soon as they reached there, Varada was told that the money for their expenses on the way had been left by mistake at Jayrambati in the house of uncle Kali, from where he was expected to fetch it without the Mother's knowledge. After Varada's departure the Mother found a mosquito-net missing, for searching out which she wanted him. As he was nowhere to be seen, she asked him on his return as to where he had been. So he had to divulge

everything. The net, however, was not to be found. Hence the Mother said, 'All the signs appear to be inauspicious.' According to the belief in those parts, the losing of anything on the way forebodes some evil.

It had been arranged that five of the bullock-carts would leave for Vishnupur that afternoon, the two palanquins with the Mother and Maku would start next morning, and the sixth cart would follow them in the afternoon. Next day at sunrise the Mother went to the shrine-room at the Ashrama to salute the Master. Afterwards, when the attendant met her at the Jagadamba-Ashrama, she said, 'So you are here! Why are you so late? It will be hot. Take this flower as a blessing for the start.' And she picked up a flower from the feet of the Master, touched it on to her head and then giving it to him said, 'Tie it to a corner of your cloth.' When the attendant bowed down before her, she made a little *japa* on his head and chest and kissed him touching his chin. At last she took leave of all and got into the palanquin. She had in her hand a stick with which she had been walking. This she now gave to Gagan (Swami Ritananda) for handing it over to uncle Prasanna, for it belonged to him. She also gave him a mosquito-net for the uncle. And she said as she departed, 'My son, there's Sarat (Saradananda) to look after you all.' As Gagan found no occasion for such a remark in the present context, he went on musing over it with some apprehension.

The palanquin moved on. After passing Kotulpur the Mother called Varada to her side to say, 'Be always by my side, and keep your eyes open as you proceed. All the ornaments of Radhu and Maku are in the latter's palanquin.' This made Varada circumspect, and knowing as he did that the leader of the bearers was a devotee of the Mother, he called him to a solitary place to say, 'Mother is apprehensive; you will have to be cautious on the way, particularly in the forest near Vishnupur.' The leader said reassuringly, 'We are thirty-two strong with a stout staff for each under the palanquins.'

At Jaypur the Mother ordered the palanquins to be lowered. The hut in which they had cooked last time when on their way to Jayrambati, was now almost broken. The sight of it evoked a smile on the Mother's face and she said, 'Hey-day! That's our hut, my boy.' She went near it, sat on a blanket under a tree, and brought out two rupees for fried-rice for a light repast for the bearers. Then she heated the milk for Maku's son and went to the tank nearby to wash her hands and feet. Then she ordered a piece worth of fried-rice for herself and some more of the same stuff as also some fried things for Varada and Maku. When the fried-rice came, the Mother munched a little and then passing it on to others, she said, 'I can no longer chew it.' The journey was resumed after all had finished their meals.

The eight miles of the road from Jaypur to Vishnupur runs through such thick forest that one is afraid to pass through it even in the day-time. In the centre of the forest about four miles from Jaypur, there is a place called Tantipukur where a shop caters to the needs of the passers-by. When the party arrived at the shop they found some people of the labouring class chatting there. If they could get clear of the place somehow, they would come across scattered houses after another two miles, and hence there would be no cause for anxiety. But as soon as the Mother saw the shop, she said from her palanquin, 'Ask them to lower the palanquin for a while; my feet are aching because of sitting long in the palanquin. Get from that shop half a pice worth of oil in a *sal* leaf. Let me rub it on the feet.' Varada was alarmed to hear her speak thus, and he said in a whisper, 'Some doubtful characters are sitting there; you should not get down; you sit there; I shall bring the oil for you.' Then, again, Maku said, 'I am feeling thirsty by eating the fried-rice; I shall drink a little water.' The Mother said, 'Why not drink? Go and do so from yonder pond.' 'To think that she should drink that water!' remonstrated Varada

quickly. But the Mother said, 'So many passers-by are drinking there. It won't do any harm, go! You accompany her and help her to drink.' So they could leave Tantipukur only after purchasing the oil, and getting Maku's thirst quenched.

The party reached Sureshwar Sen's house at Gadadarja in Vishnupur at about two o'clock in the afternoon. Swami Atmaprakashananda and others had preceded them there by bullock-carts at about eight in the morning. They asked, 'Why this delay?' and began laughing at hearing that fried-rice eating was the cause; for the unusual liking for fried-rice of the people of Bankura is a matter of amusement for others. Sureshwar Sen had died a few months ago. The Mother said about him very feelingly, 'Alas! Whenever I came here, my Suresh used to keep standing there with folded hands; he never even got up on the verandah. How great was his devotion!' About him she used to stay at times, 'Suresh was a second Girish Babu, as it were.' The party stayed there the next day also, and started for Calcutta on the third day. They travelled in a third class bogie and reached the 'Udbodhan' at about 9 p.m. on Friday, February 27.

Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma were extremely concerned to find the Mother's body reduced to a skeleton and accused her companions saying, 'Dear me! How thin she looks! We could never realize that the Mother's health was as bad as this.' Swami Saradananda made all necessary arrangement for treatment from the very next day.

Dr. Kanjilal treated the Mother with homoeopathic medicine from February 28; and the fever subsided on the fourth day. But on the seventh day the temperature again went up to 101°, and the treatment showed no results. Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati was called in on the fourteenth day. This new treatment bore fruit after about a week, from whence the Mother had no fever for a fortnight. This was extremely reassuring, so much so, that the devotees were one day allowed to come in and salute her. But

after fifteen days there was a relapse, and along with that there arose a new difficulty. The Kaviraj prescribed an infusion of several drugs boiled together which was to be taken every morning. This was so bitter that the taste lingered till noon, so that the Mother could not relish any food, and therefore ate very little. The Kaviraj being informed of this said that he was helpless since his system of medicines knew of no drug that was not bitter for this disease. As a last resort Dr. Bepin Behari Ghosh, an allopath, was entrusted with the treatment from April 8. He treated her for about a month; but as no definite result was visible, Dr. Prandhan Bose, a noted physician, was called in on May 1, and the help of Dr. Sureshchandra Bhattacharya and Dr. Nilratan Sarkar was also taken for a proper diagnosis of the disease. At last on May 16, Dr. Bose declared that it was a case of kala-azar. The doctor tried his best to bring the disease under control, but by June 1, it became apparent that the allopathic physicians had given up all hope of recovery. As a last resort, therefore, the indigenous system of treatment was resumed on that date by Kaviraj Rajendranath Sen who was helped by Kaviraj Kalibhushan Sen. Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati, too, came again. His pupil, Kaviraj Ramachandra Mallik, visited the Mother every day and prepared the medicine with his own hands. During the last three days Dr. Kanjilal administered homoeopathic medicines once again.

In fact, from the day that the Mother came to the 'Udbodhan', Swami Saradananda did all that lay in his power to get the Mother restored to normal health. Apart from medical treatment, he tried to enlist in the cause the supernatural agencies also. But there was no sign of improvement in her condition. Her temperature rose three or four times each day, and when it went very high up, she lost consciousness. It was summer, and the excess of bile produced such a burning sensation all over the skin that the Mother used to say, 'I shall dip my body

in the water of a pond covered with weeds.' The attendants cooled their hands over ice and passed them over her body. If there was no ice, the Mother placed her hands on the bare bodies of those who had low temperature. The continuous suffering turned her into a veritable little girl. As she felt no comfort on her bed, she called in her attendant Rashbihari one morning and said, 'Seat me on your lap.' Sarala Devi, another attendant was near at hand, and so Rashbihari said to her, 'Seat the Mother a little on your lap, you are a woman.' As she kept silent, a few pillows were arranged in a pile and the Mother was seated reclining on them; and she was otherwise consoled.

Even in the midst of this ordeal, her tender motherly heart was ever solicitous for the welfare of all. Indeed, it had an even more charming expression at that time. When the attendant came to the Mother in the morning, before going to the Kaviraj's house, to inquire about her condition, she would invariably say, 'Eat before you go; for you will be late in returning.' When the Kavirajas went down after seeing her, she used to say, 'Give to the grandson (Kalibhushan Sen) of the old man (Durgaprasad Sen) some refreshment — some swelets, some mangoes. Give to Ram Kaviraj, and the old Kaviraj (Rajendranath Sen).' The Mother showed the same affection to Drs. Jnanendranath Kanjilal, Durgapada Ghosh, and Shyamapada Mukherji whenever they came; and she made tender inquiries about them and their families. One day when Prabhakar Mukherji and Manindra Bose of Arambagh came, she asked them in a faint voice, 'Are you well, my dears? Shall I live? I can't eat anything and am very feeble.' Then she inquired about that part of the country, 'Has it rained?' Manindra Bose had sent some green palm fruits with a woman named Ramani who was known to the Mother. The Mother remembered the fact and said, 'I didn't know when Ramani came; I was unconscious owing to the fever. Tell her not to be sorry on that account.' Swami Adbhutananda (Latu) was then

seriously ill at Banaras. The Mother was aware of this, and hence she used to ask any one coming from there, 'How is Latu?'

Many were present at the 'Udbodhan' who would feel blessed if they could serve the Mother in any way; but the Mother avoided such service so scrupulously that it was hard to get an opportunity. One day, as she lay down to have a little rest after taking her noon-day diet, an attendant thought that to be an excellent opportunity for fanning her so that she might have a good nap. But he had moved the fan for some four or five minutes only, when the Mother said, 'It's no more necessary; your hand must be aching.' The attendant explained that a hand-fan does not tire one out so easily and that he would stop as soon as it became tiresome. But after a few minutes the Mother reopened her eyes to repeat, 'No, my son, your hand will ache; you stop; I shall sleep without it.' As the attendant did not stop even then, she said soon after, 'My dear boy, I can't have any sleep thinking that your hands will ache. You stop the fan, then I can sleep without any anxiety.' The fan had to be stopped at last; the attendant could serve hardly for ten minutes.

On his first visits Dr. Prandhan Bose was paid sixteen rupees daily as his fees over and above his taxi fare. One day somebody sent for the Mother plenty of fruits, flowers, sweets, and curd. When tinhe evening the doctor was talking downstairs with Swami Saradananda after examining the patient, some of these things were placed in his car according to the Mother's direction. The doctor looked happy in seeing these presents. Next day when he came for his daily visit, he looked round the room a little more closely to find a picture of the Master there. He was a Christian, but had a very liberal mind, which was moved by all he saw. Going down he asked Swami Saradananda as to who it was that he had been treating all those days. The Swami explained everything and in the course of the conversation told him that the

expenses were being defrayed by the devotees. From that day the generous doctor stopped charging fees; nay, when the treatment was changed a few days later, he kept coming every day, paying the taxi fare himself and spending a good deal of time at the 'Udbodhan' inquiring about his patient.

Equally with her kindness and politeness for all was noticeable her loving behaviour towards all her relatives during the early stages of her illness. In the middle of March, her nephew Ramlal came to see the Mother with his sister Lakshmi Devi and others while on their way to a celebration at Entally in Calcutta. After some time had elapsed in conversation, the Mother told Lakshmi Devi of Yogin-Ma's illness. Lakshmi Devi then went to see her and from there proceeded to Entally without revisiting the Mother, who had, however, been expecting her. Finding at last that they had departed, she told Brahmachari Varada, 'Look here! In the course of the conversation I forgot to give a cloth and some money to Lakshmi. You now go to Entally with Kestolal (Swami Dhirananda) to witness the celebration and give the cloth and money to her. They decorate the Master tastefully at Entally.' With this she ordered somebody to take out two rupees and a piece of cloth with a fine border to be handed over to Varada for presentation to Lakshmi Devi.

In the midst of this suffering, again, she helped her disciples in the path of spirituality and initiated at least one fortunate man. In these matters she paid no heed to warnings that she should not strain herself.

On her sick-bed she had to sustain three shocks. Swami Adbhutananda passed away on April 24, and Ramakrishna Bose, a disciple of the Mother and son of the noted devotee Balaram Bose, departed on May 14. It was decided that in consideration of the Mother's condition, the news should be withheld from her. But Golap-Ma inadvertently divulged it all, with the result that the Mother wept sending up her temperature. She had little sleep that

night. A week after the death of Ramakrishna Bose, uncle Varadaprasad succumbed to pneumonia at Jayrambati. This was also kept back from her. She knew that he was seriously ill, and therefore inquired now and then, 'How is Varada?' But after her brother's passing away, she put a different question. 'Is Varada no more? I saw him standing near the railing (on the verandah) and looking at me.' Then the truth had to be told. This was very poignant to the Mother; she could not control her tears at the loss of this beloved brother.

But we must not merely give attention to her tears and sorrow; we must also take note of her non-attachment. She wept for her brother; but from Brahmachari Gopesh we have an account of what happened only a few days later. Writes he: 'At that time I was very much surprised to hear what the Mother said one day. A few days earlier, uncle Varada had died. Although the Mother was momentarily overwhelmed with grief at that, she soon wiped it away from her mind. She passed on the news to me thus with absolute unconcern, "Did you hear? Varada is dead." At first I failed to understand whom she was talking about, for it was altogether beyond my imagination that she could tell of the death of her very dear brother without any emotion. So I kept on looking at her quizzically. Then the Mother explained, "Father of Fudi (Kshudi) of Jayrambati." The news made me extremely sad; but my surprise at the absence of any pang on the Mother's part was even greater.'

Some still more astonishing events followed to convince the devotees very rudely that the Mother was gradually gliding out of this world of attachment, and that the sweet snares, which she had voluntarily woven round herself, were being rent asunder one by one. When in the middle of March a devotee said, 'Mother, your health has deteriorated badly this time. I never saw your body so weak', the Mother replied, 'Yes, my son, it has become very weak. Methinks, whatever work of the Master was

to be done by this body is over. Now the mind hankers for him only, and likes nothing else. See, for instance, how I loved Radhu, and how much I have done for her happiness and comfort; but now my mood is changed. When she comes to my side now, I feel unhappy and I begin thinking, "Why does she come here to try to drag down my mind?" The Master kept my mind bound down by all these things for the sake of his work, otherwise could it have been possible for me to stay on after he left?'

The mind was really getting detached. When tossing about in her bed owing to the intense fever, she was often heard to say, 'Take me to the side of the Ganges; I shall feel cooler near the Ganges.' It seemed as if she wanted to be freed from all old associations. Swami Saradananda searched for a house on the bank of the Ganges, and there was talk of taking her to Banaras. But the physicians said that removal at that stage was inadvisable.

So there could be no change of place. But that could not certainly prevent her from getting rid of entanglements. Gauri-Ma and Durga Devi used to visit the Mother every day while returning from their bath in the Ganges. They then sat by her for some time and fanned her. But one day as they came there, the Mother said, 'Don't touch me. Why do you come every day to annoy me—for what purpose, and to see what?' This unexpected indifference came like a bolt from the blue, and Gauri-Ma said imploringly, 'Mother, you are lying ill, and we find no peace of mind. We want to be always by your side, but cant find time. That's why we come once in a day to you.' The Mother still persisted in the same strain, 'What will you gain by coming to me? I can no longer bear to hear anybody's problems.' Then she cooled down and added, "Even if you come, don't enter my room. See me from outside that door and depart; and don't make me talk on any matter.' Gauri-Ma was thunder-struck! She could speak no more, but shed profuse tears and took leave with a heavy heart. From the next day they came at the usual

time, but without entering the room, sat for an hour at the place indicated by the Mother, and through silent tears communicated the grief in their hearts. The Mother saw all this, but remained remorseless.

Next came Radhu's turn. Yes, Radhu, too, was rejected, though this may sound unbelievable. A few days before the Mother passed into Life Eternal, she said to Radhu, 'Look here! You go away to Jayrambati; don't stay here any longer.' And to her attendant Sarala Devi, she said, 'Ask Sarat to send them to Jayrambati.' Sarala Devi inquired, 'Why do you want them to be sent? Can you live without Radhu?' 'I can do so well enough,' replied the Mother firmly. 'I have dissociated my mind (from her).' When Sarala Devi communicated this to Yogin-Ma and Swami Saradananda, Yogin-Ma asked the Mother, 'Mother, why do you want them to be sent away?' The Mother answered, 'In future they will have to stay there as a matter of course. Hari is going; send them along with him. I have withdrawn the mind, and there's no more need for them.' Yogin-Ma implored, 'Don't you be saying so, Mother. If you withdraw your mind, how shall we live?' But the Mother whose vision was now directed towards the Infinity beyond all delusion, said with disconcerting indifference, 'Yogin, I have discarded all attachment, no more of that.' What more could Yogin-Ma add where pleading was of no avail? Morosely she went to Swami Saradananda and related the whole affair. He drew a deep, heavy sigh and said helplessly, 'Then we can no longer hold back the Mother. Now that she has taken off her mind from Radhu, there's no further hope.' He then said to Sarala Devi who was near at hand, 'All of you try, if the Mother's mind can be brought back a little to Radhu.' But their efforts bore no fruit. On the contrary, understanding their motive the Mother said without any ambiguity, 'Know it for certian that the mind that I have turned back will not come down again.'

As days rolled on, this resolution of the Mother became all the more pronounced and filled everyone with

desperation. Soon after Brahmachari Hari left for Jayrambati, the Mother asked Varada, 'Why did not Radhu, Nalini, and others go away to Jayrambati with Hari? You escort them all there.' Swami Saradananda being informed of this development was quite at a loss to fix upon any course of action. Other devotees, too, thought, 'Radhu is dear to the Mother as the apple of her eye; she is so fond of Radhu that it is hard for her to live one moment without her. Even while on sick-bed she often inquired about Radhu and her son. And now she is eager to send them away to Jayrambati, even though her own condition is so very bad. It all passes one's imagination.' But if people could not understand the Mother's disposition at that time, or they refused to believe what they witnessed, in a short while her determined attitude dispelled all doubts from their hearts. Noticing the Mother's irritation, Nalini Devi dared not approach her any longer, and she shed silent tears. At last she said in dismay, 'If our presence is galling to aunt, we may as well go away. But what will people say? They will think, "Look at this! The Mother is so seriously ill, and these have come away deserting her at this time!"' Swami Saradananda therefore, pleaded with the Mother, 'It will pain them to go away during this illness of yours. They will leave as soon as you recover a little.' The Mother still persisted, 'Well, it will be better if they are sent away. In any case, see that they don't come to me any more. I have no desire to see so much as their shadows any longer.' So completely free had she become! For ten days before the final departure, the Mother slept on a bed spread on the floor. One day at noon when Radhu was asleep and an attendant was sitting by the Mother, nursing her, Radhu's baby Banu got up from sleep and crawling to the Mother's side tried to climb on to her breast, as was his wont, when the Mother said to him, 'I have totally freed myself from all fondness for you. Go, go, you can no longer succeed.' Then to the attendant she said, 'Lift him up and keep him on that side. I don't like these any longer.'

The attendant took the baby into his arms and left it with its grandmother in the adjoining room.

The Mother's condition was worsening. Her frame became so shrivelled that it seemed to be indistinguishable from the bed. The physicians gave up all hope and the Mother, too, realized this. When she suffered similarly on the previous occasion she had said, 'I shall have to suffer likewise over again.' This time, when her affectionate attendant supplicated, 'Mother, you can certainly stay on if you just wish to do so', she simply said, 'Who indeed wants to die?' She had no will of her own then, she had resigned herself entirely to the Divine wishes; and keeping her ears pricked up for the last call she said, 'I shall go, whenever he takes me.' She incarnated for the good of all; and in order to establish contact between her free mind and this world of small interests, she adopted Radhu as a medium with whom she had a tie of affection. Now that tie was cut asunder; and when Radhu came to the Mother's room one day, she said to her, 'I have let loose (my mind) from its post. What will you do to me? Am I a human being?' These were the last words she spoke to Radhu. As Radhu knew the Mother only as a mortal, she did not so much as try to comprehend the meaning of those words uttered so unexpectedly; and the Mother, too, gave her no opportunity to do so.

About a month before the last day, she asked the picture of the Master that she worshipped at the shrine to be removed to some other room, for she explained that it would be presently impossible for her to go out even when necessary, and that a sick-bed and shrine could hardly be in the same place. Her direction was obeyed.

Seven days before the passing away, she sent for Swami Saradananda at about 8-30 a.m. He came and knelt near the Mother's feet on the left side and tried to caress her hand with his. She promptly held his right hand under her left and said, 'Sarat, I leave them all with you', and as quickly drew away her hand. Swami Saradananda

suppressed his tears with difficulty and with a heavy heart moved out of the room, walking slowly backward and keeping his eyes fixed on her.

There were then two classes of attendants—the monks and Brahmacharis, and the women devotees. The monks went to the doctors, brought medicines, procured milk, prepared liquid diets, and fanned the Mother. The women cooked rice, administered the diets, washed clothes, cleaned the bed, and did other things in general. The Mother then behaved like a little girl—she was simple, importunate about trifles, and yet totally without any interest in anything. One midnight as Sarala Devi wanted to feed her, the Mother said petulantly, 'I won't eat. You have only two sentences, "Mother, eat", and "Mother, apply the stick (thermometer)".' Sarala had learnt a trick to make her change her mood under such circumstances. She had only to suggest that it would be best to call in Swami Saradananda to rectify any defect that there might have been; and the Mother would at once become reasonable and behave like a good girl. So she tried the remedy tonight and said, 'Mother, should I then call in Maharaj (Swami Saradananda)?' The Mother still remained intractable and said, 'Call Sarat. I won't eat from your hand.' Swami Saradananda came immediately. Making him sit by her, the Mother said, 'Do pass your hand over my body a little, my son.' And taking hold of both his hands she added, 'See my son, how much they vex me; they can only say, "Eat, eat", and they can only apply that stick (thermometer) under the arm. Tell her not to pester me any more.' Swami Saradananda said softly, 'No, Mother, they won't vex you any longer.' Having consoled her in this way, he said after a little while. 'Mother, will you eat a little now?' The Mother said, 'Give.' When the Swami asked Sarala Devi to bring the diet the Mother said, 'No, you feed me; I won't take from her hand.' The Swami took the feeding cup in hand and held the nozzle to the Mother's lips. When she had drunk a little

milk from the cup, the Swami said, 'Mother, rest a while and then drink again.' Greatly pleased at this consideration, the Mother said, 'Just see, how finely he speaks, "Mother rest a while and then drink again!" Don't they know how to speak such a simple thing? Just see how she has worried my son at this dead of night! Go, my son, and sleep.' And with these words she patted his back a little. The Swami arranged the mosquito-net and said, 'Good night, Mother.' The Mother said, 'Good night, my son. Alas, how my son has been disturbed!' Up till then the Swami had been cherishing a desire to render some personal service to the Holy Mother, whose shyness, however, stood in the way. But before she finally took leave of him, she gave him an opportunity to have his desire fulfilled.

That an infinite affection influenced all that the Mother did up to her last moment is proved by her extreme consideration for Swami Saradananda as revealed in the last incident. Her love for Sarala Devi was equally tender as the subsequent event proves. Sarala Devi could well understand the vexation of such a patient at being asked to take diet and to use the thermometer so frequently; and hence she suggested to Swami Saradananda to change the duties. He complied and accordingly Varada and the widow of Navasan did Sarala's duties for two days during which time Sarala Devi kept herself studiously aloof. The Mother did not fail to notice this and made constant inquiries about her. At last at noon of the second day the Mother had Sarala called to herself, and placing the latter's head on her bosom, she said, 'Are you angry with me, my daughter? Don't you mind, my dear, if I have said anything.' Sarala could say nothing, but began shedding tears, and she resumed her duties.

As a result of the disease, the Mother's hands and feet became swollen and she could not move out of the bed. Sudhira Devi of thc Nivedita School with her girl students stayed by the Mother's side by turns to fan her and help

the attendants in other ways. There were now only five days left, when a woman devotee known as Annapurna's mother came to see the Mother. But as admission was prohibited to outsiders, she stood at the door-way. Just then the Mother turned over to a side and noticing her there, beckoned her to enter. The devotee came in and said with a choked voice, 'Mother, what will be our lot?' In a very tender but feeble voice the Mother said, 'What fear is there? You have seen the Master. What fear can there be for you?' She stopped for a while and then added slowly and softly, 'But one thing I tell you—if you want peace, my daughter, don't find fault with others, but find fault rather with yourself. Learn to make the world your own. Nobody is a stranger, my dear; the world is yours.' These were the last words of the Mother of the Universe to those afflicted souls for lightening whose burden She incarnated Herself out of Her infinite compassion undergoing all these ordeals of life on earth.

For three days preceding the departure, she hardly spoke, but remained merged in her Self; she felt disgusted at any attempt to drag down the mind to the physical plane. Gradually she stopped talking altogether. To a weeping attendant her last consolation was, 'There's Sarat (Saradananda); don't be afraid.' At last at 1.30 a.m. on July 21, 1920, she drew a few heavy breaths and then entered into *Mahasamadhi.* The long disease had made her frame skeletal, the eyes sunken, and complexion dark. But in the peace and silence of the final departure her face became free from all signs of affliction and regaining its usual fullness shone with ethereal lustre which lasted even when the body became cold, so much so, that owing to that placid brilliance, many on-lookers could not believe that life had become extinct.

Next morning (July 21), under the leadership of Swami Saradananda, the devotees decorated the body with flowers and garlands and carried it on their shoulders singing in chorus the *Rama-nama kirtana.* The procession started

at obout half past ten and proceeded from the 'Udbodhan' northward to Baranagore, just opposite the Belur Math. There they crossed the Ganges in boats and laid the body on the bank of the river at the Math. A large number of devotees had gathered there by that time. The women now took charge of the body and bathed it in the sacred water of the Ganges. The pyre of sandal wood was lighted at about three o'clock in the afternoon, on the bank of the Ganges, a few yards north of Swami Vivekananda's temple. The body was offered there as a sacrifice. In the meantime the other bank of the river was overcast with clouds. Then followed a shower. The devotees apprehended that this might interfere with the funeral fire. But nothing happened on the western bank till nightfall. When at dusk all was finished and Swami Saradananda poured out the first pitcher of Ganges water for putting out the fire, a heavy shower came down to extinguish it completely without any further human endeavour. The Mother's corporeal body was there no more, the fire was out, and the devotees slowly returned home with a natural shower of benediction pouring on their heads.

* * *

On that sacred spot was erected a small temple and on the Holy Mother's birthday on December 21, 1921, it was duly consecrated. The Holy Mother is still there receiving daily adoration from her sons and daughters and attracting many others from countries all over the world and filling their hearts with bliss and plenitude.

Peace! Peace!! Peace !!!

If you want peace, don't find fault with others, but find fault rather with yourself. Learn to make the world your own. Nobody is a stranger, my dear; the world is yours.

Dr. G.V. Sarveswara Rao
M A., Ph. D., (I. I Sc)

APPENDIX I

CHRONOLOGY

Birth	..	December 22, 1853
Marriage and first visit to Kamarpukur	..	May 1859
Second visit to Kamarpukur	..	December 1860
Third visit to Kamarpukur	..	May (?), 1866
Fourth visit to Kamarpukur	..	December 1866—January 1
Fifth visit to Kamarpukur (With the Master there)	..	May–November 1867
First visit to Dakshineswar	..	March (?), 1872
Shodasi-puja	..	June 5, 1872
At Jayrambati	..	Middle of 1873
Death of her father	..	March 26, 1874
Second visit to Dakshineswar	..	Middle of 1874
At Jayrambati	..	September 1875
Severe attack of dysentery and awakening of Simhavahini	..	1875
Commencement of Jagaddhatri worship	..	November 1875
Death of her mother-in-law	..	February 27, 1876
Shambhu Babu's donation of a house	..	April 11, 1876
Third visit to Dakshineswar (Meeting with robbers at Telo-bhelo)	..	January 1877
Fourth visit to Dakshineswar	..	February or March 1881
Hridaya left Dakshineswar	..	June 1881
Fifth visit to Dakshineswar	..	February 1882
Sixth visit to Dakshineswar	..	1884
Seventh visit to Dakshineswar	..	March 1885
With the Master at Shyampukur	..	October 1885
With the Master at Cossipore	..	December 11, 1885
Vow of fast at Tarakeswar	..	During this period
Passing away of the Master	..	August 16, 1886
First pilgrimage to North India (mainly Vrindaban)	..	August 30, 1886

At Kamarpukur (for about nine months)	.. From September 1887
At Nilambar Mukherji's garden (Belur)	.. Up to October 1888
At Puri	.. From November 1888
At Kamarpukur	.. From February 1889
Pilgrimage to Gaya	.. March 25, 1890
At Ghushuri (Belur)	.. May–September 1890
At Jayrambati	.. October 1890
At Nilambar Babu's garden (*Panchatapa*)	.. 1893
At Kailwar (two months)	.. 1894
Second pilgrimage to Vrindaban	.. 1895
To Kamarpukur and Jayrambati	.. May 13, 1895
At Sharat Sarkar's house, Calcutta	.. April 1896
At Sarkarbari Lane, Calcutta	.. 1896
At Bosepara Lane, Calcutta	.. 1898–99
Opening of the Nivedita School	.. November 12, 1898
Passing away of Swami Yogananda	.. March 28, 1899
At Bosepara Lane	.. 1901–2
Durga worship at Belur	.. 18th–22nd of October, 1901
In Bagbazar Street	.. 1904–5
Second pilgrimage to Puri	.. 1904–5
Death of Shyamasundari Devi	.. End of January 1906
Durga worship at Girish's house	.. October 1907
First visit to the 'Udbodhan'	.. May 23, 1909
At Kothar	.. December 1910
In the South	.. February–March 1911
Marriage of Radhu	.. June 10, 1911
Durga worship at Belur	.. 16th–21st of October, 1912
At Banaras	.. November 5, 1912–January 15, 1913

At Koalpara	.. August–September 1915
In the new house at Jayrambati	.. May 15, 1916
Durga worship at Belur	.. 3rd–6th of October, 1916
At Koalpara (fever)	.. March–April 1918
In Calcutta	.. May 7, 1918
At the Nivedita School	.. December 31, 1918
At Koalpara with Radhu	.. January 30–July 23, 1919
At the ' Udbodhan '	.. February 27, 1919
Mahasamadhi	.. July 21, 1920

APPENDIX II

GENEALOGY OF THE MUKHERJIS OF JAYRAMBATI

Khelaram
Narottam
Vaidyanath
Kartikram

- Ramchandra = Shyamasundari
  - Sarada
  - Kadambini
  - Prasannakumar = Rampriya–Suvasini
    - Nalini
    - Sushila (Maku)
    - Kamala
    - Vimala
    - Gaanpati
      - Bhudev
      - Radharaman
  - Kalikumar = Subodhbala
  - Varadaprasad = Indumati
    - Kshudiram
    - Vijaykrishna
  - Abhaycharan = Surabala
    - Radharani
- Trailokya
- Ishwar
  - Suryanarayan
- Nilmadhav

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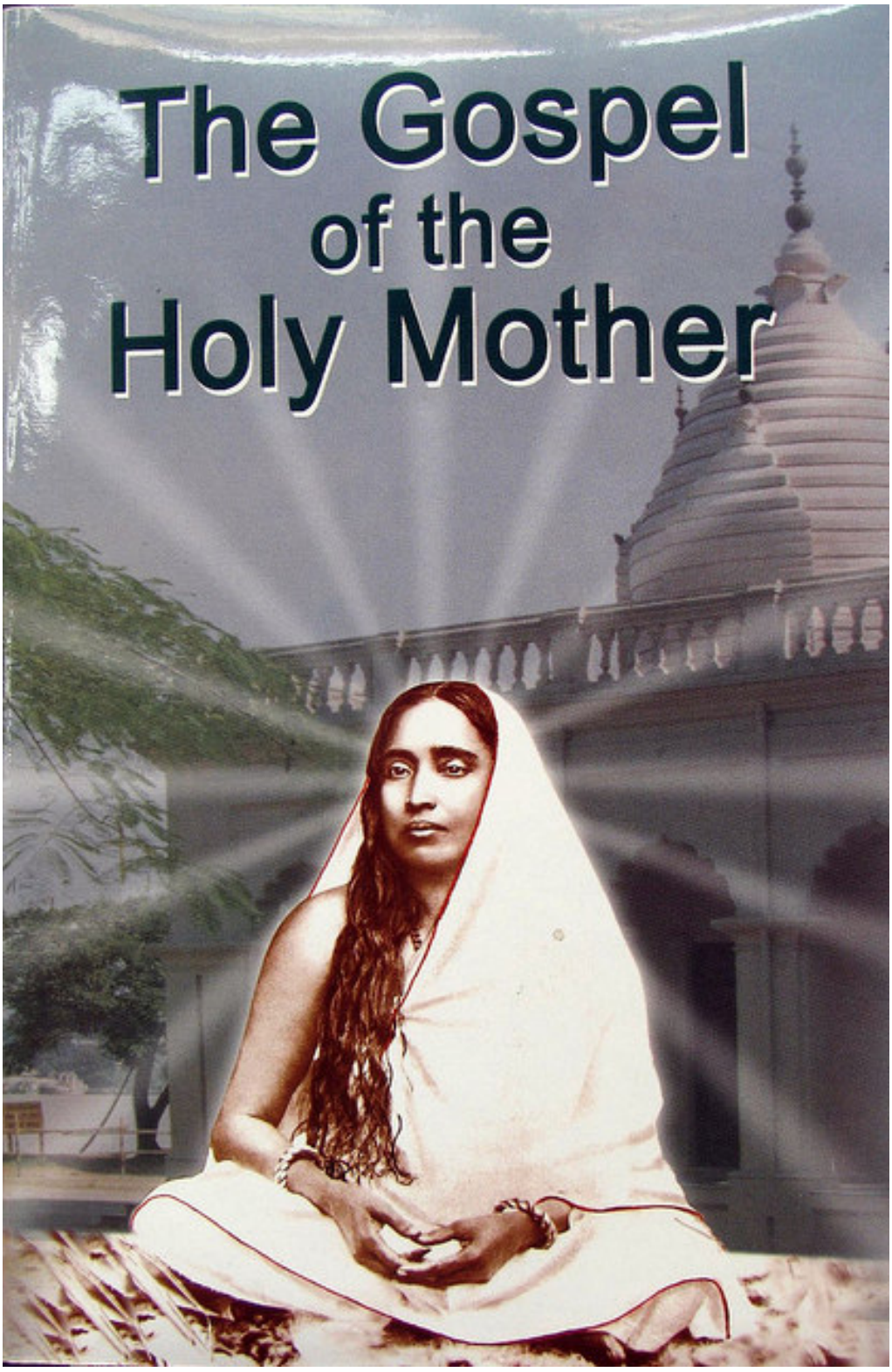

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Preface

'The Gospel of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi', is the full translation of the Bengali work 'Sri Sri Mayer Katha', parts of which have already come out in translation under other titles. This Math itself had published some important sections of it as early as 1940 under the title 'Conversations of the Holy Mother', incorporated in her biography 'Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother'. The present book, however, embodies the whole of the Bengali text. Most of the reminiscences and conversations of the Holy Mother, except what appears in the great work of Swami Saradeshananda, entitled 'The Mother as I saw her', also published by this Math, are now available for the English reading public in one volume.

Recorded as it is by a large number of the devotee-children of the Mother, the present book reveals to mankind a great character that chose to remain outside public notice behind the Purdah and in the obscurity of the village of Jayrambati. Even under these conditions the great lady's greatness could not be obscured. Through the impressions and recollections of a large number of men and women of various stations in life, who came into contact with Sri Sarada Devi, her greatness emerges in the bright colours of Universal Motherhood, never before witnessed in so striking a manner in any personality we know of. Therefore, while the contents of this book are of special importance to the followers of Sri Ramakrishna, they can make an appeal to all who appreciate the great human value of motherliness.

The book is divided into three parts, as the translation has been done by three different persons. The reminiscences are of several people numbering 38. These recorders are both men and women, monastics and lay, and the reminiscences are of varying length and importance. But all the recorders were close to the Mother, some of them being very intimate with her as her personal attendants. It would have been possible to give greater perfection to the book, if we were able to give a few details at least about these recorders; but at this distance of time, it is not possible to gather precise information about most of them, except in the case of the few monastics who figure among them. So we have not given any biographical notes about the recorders.

It is hoped that the book will be appreciated by the general public, and especially by the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna.

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Introduction: A Life-sketch of Holy Mother

Introduction

As these Conversations of the Holy Mother, now published under the title, The Gospel of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, are likely to fall into the hands of many who are not at all acquainted with her life, we think it is proper to add a short biographical account of hers as an Introduction to it. For, to understand the relevancy of these conversations, to grasp how they are revelatory of a great character through small incidents and talks that took place outside the public gaze, a knowledge of the facts of her life is an absolute necessity. Hence the following short life-sketch of hers is added to this book as an Introduction.

Early Life

Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother was the Divine Consort and first disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and thus an integral part of his spiritual self and of the saving message he delivered unto mankind. Unlike the spiritual counterparts of the past incarnations like Rama, Krishna and Buddha and some others. Sri Sarada Devi was born in a poor but cultured Brahmana family of Bengal in the village of Jayrambati in the Bankura District, situated about sixty miles to the west of Calcutta. Born on 22nd December 1853, as the eldest daughter of Ramachandra Mukherjee and Shyamasundari Devi, her early girlhood was spent, as in the case of most girls of rural upbringing, in various domestic chores like caring for the younger children, looking after cattle and carrying food to her father and others engaged in work in the field. She had absolutely no schooling, though she learnt the Bengali alphabet and practised a little of reading and writing in later days by herself. But the domestic environment of a pious Brahmana family supplemented by the holy associations she had in later days imparted to her-to one with such high natural endowments as she-an education that was far more enlightening than instruction in the three R's.

Marriage

She entered into Sri Ramakrishna's life as his partner in it when she was aged only five. The strange marriage of Gadadhar of twenty three years of age with Sarada of five was part of a divine dispensation, and took place in a

way that can only be described as Providential. When Gadadhar, as Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master used to be known in those days, was passing through the early phase of his spiritual adventure, his near and dear ones thought that marriage would have a resettling and stabilising effect on his mind, which had lost all interest in worldly affairs. But their search for a suitable bride met with failure every time they started on it, until Gadadhar himself came to their rescue. The relatives had kept their plans unknown to Gadadhar, as they feared a vehement protest from him; but upsetting all their worldly-wise calculations, Gadadhar himself came to the rescue of his disconcerted relatives. In an ecstatic mood, he declared: "Why are you searching for a bride here and there? She who is ' marked ' for me is awaiting at the house of Ramachandra Mukherjee at Jayrambati." And that 'marked one' they found, was none other than Sarada Devi, the five year old daughter of Ramachandra Mukherjee and Shyamasundari Devi of Jayrambati.

There is a tradition of an incident of an earlier day indicative of the divinely ordained nature of this alliance. It was the occasion of a temple festival in the neighbourhood where quite a number of families from Kamarpukur and Jayrambati had gathered. Among them were young Gadadhar and infant Sarada. Some women folk on such occasions indulge in the pastime of pre-planning possible marriage alliances for the future. It seems when infant Sarada was asked whom she would marry, she pointed to the boy Gadadhar.

After the marriage, Sarada had occasion, when she was seven and again at thirteen and fourteen, to meet Gadadhar and be with him for a few days each time. Though on these occasions she had the happy experience of serving him, a really meaningful meeting between them took place only later, when she went to Dakshineswar to meet him under strange circumstances. Hearing the rampant rumour that the village gossips bandied about regarding Sri Ramakrishna's mental condition, young Sarada, now eighteen, felt much upset, and a sense of her duty to be by her husband's side to serve him in his ailment began to dominate her mind. So under the guise of a pilgrimage to the holy Ganga, she went with her father to Dakshineswar Temple at Calcutta, where the Master was then staying. Trudging most of the sixty miles to Calcutta, she arrived unannounced at Dakshineswar one night in March 1872, stricken with fever on the way, to boot.

The Mother at Dakshineswar

It was in every way a very strange meeting. Sri Ramakrishna had been passing through a mood of intense longing for God, and his spirit of renunciation of what he called 'Woman and Gold' was raging in his mind with the tempo of a whirl-wind. An ascetic in that mood is the last man one can expect to meet a situation of this type with composure. We expect him to flee the place or put on a very rude and cruel attitude of disregard. But the Master's response now was as unexpected as when the proposal for marriage was made. He extended a very warm welcome to his wife, made arrangements for her stay and medical treatment, and in every way behaved towards her as a devoted husband should do.

This great event took place in March, 1872. From now onward, with breaks of short intervals for visits to her mother at Jayrambati, Sarada Devi was by the side of Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar and later at Cossipore till 1886 when death separated them in a physical sense. It was a period of training and discipleship, during which the Mother in her became more and more manifest making her ready to take up the leadership of the spiritual Movement that the Master inaugurated. She became the first and foremost of his disciples. This transformation was effected through her service of the Master and the practice of devotional disciplines he prescribed for her. It was a silent and profound process, about the details of which the world knows so little. The type of personality into which she was shaped through that training was one characterised by inexhaustible patience and peace, extreme simplicity combined with dignity, a non-turbulent but compelling spiritual fervour, a loving temperament that knew no distinction between friend and foe, and a maternal attitude of a spontaneous type towards all, that charmed and brought under her influence everyone who came near her.

She spent nearly the whole of the Dakshineswar period of her life of thirteen years, extending from 1872 to 1885, except when she went to Jayrambati periodically, in a small room in the northern side of the temple compound, called the Nahabat, from where she could get a view of the room in which the Master lived.

The ground floor of the Nahabat or Concert House was a small low-roofed octagonal room of less than 50 sq. feet in area, with a verandah four and a quarter feet wide surrounding it. Besides being her living room it served as her provision store, kitchen and reception room too-a surprising combination of functions for such a small enclosure. But so patient and long-suffering she was that what would have been impossible for others, was no problem to

her. Several aristocratic women of Calcutta, fat and plump, would stand at the door of the Nahabat, and leaning forward, holding the door frame, would say: "Ah! What a tiny room for our good girl! She is, as it were in exile, like Sita." In later days the Holy Mother would, while recounting the experiences of her early days, tell her nieces, "You won't be able to live in such a room even for a day."

Appreciating the extreme inadequacy of her accommodation, a devotee by name Sambhu Mallick built in April 1874 a small house on a plot very near the temple for her to stay. She stayed there for about one year, but left it for the Nahabat when the Great Master fell ill with dysentery, as she wanted to be by his side for nursing him. After that, however, she never went back to that house.

Her life began every day at three a.m., and being a strict observer of the Purdah, she finished her ablutions in the Ganges long before daybreak when people began moving about. Till it was broad daylight, she spent her time in meditation and Japa. She never came out till about one p.m., when there would be no one round about. She would then sit out drying her long and luxuriant locks in the sun. In fact she lived so quietly and unobserved there that the temple Manager said once, "We have heard that she lives here, but we have never seen her." The Master appreciated her extreme reserve, but none the less felt anxious for her health, as continuous stay in that small room carried with it grave health hazards. The verandah round the room was also screened for making the place fit for a strict Purdah lady to live in. She used to stand behind the screen on the damp floor of her house and watch through holes in the screen the Master singing and dancing in ecstasy beyond the open northern door of the room. All this brought rheumatic pain in her legs. Afterwards, on the Master's advice, she began to go out of the room and meet the ladies of some known houses in the neighbourhood.

During the day much of her time was taken up with cooking for the Master and devotees. Sri Ramakrishna's stomach was very delicate and could not stand the temple food. So Sri Sarada Devi prepared the diet for him and personally served it to him, coaxing him to take sufficient quantities of it. She also did the other personal services for the Master like cleaning his room, washing clothes, etc. The Master's mother was also staying at Dakshineswar in her last days, and Sarada Devi attended on her as well with meticulous care. Although in the earlier years her cooking work was limited, it gradually swelled to enormous proportions, as the number of the Master's

devotees began to increase. Many of them stayed overnight or sometimes for a whole day with him. They had to be fed, and the Mother took upon herself that duty too. It is said that daily she made chapatis out of seven pounds of wheat flour, and prepared the condiments required for them. Besides, betel rolls for the Master and devotees were required, and countless were the rolls she prepared every day.

All through the day quite a large number of women devotees, who came to see the Master, made the Nahabat their first place of halt and spent much time in conversation. Some of them also stayed overnight with her in that small room. Besides attending to her household duties, she also spent hours in watching from the Nahabat the scenes of devotional fervour that went on in the Master's room. During nights she spent long hours in meditation. Her whole time was thus occupied with acts of service of the Master and his devotees and with the practice of devotional disciplines. It was an ideal way of living in which work and worship went hand in hand, and led to a harmonious development of personality.

Spiritual and Secular Training

The Master took great care to help her in the development of her talents both in the secular and the spiritual fields of life. He taught her how to conduct herself with dignity and success in everyday life. While the Master gave her an all-round education, the emphasis of course was on the spiritual side. We do not know of the details of the spiritual practices she underwent, but we know that under the guidance of the Master she practised Japa and meditation with great intensity every day in the morning and at night. In an admonition given to her niece Nalini, she once gave a hint about the intensity of her practices amidst the discharge of the heavy duties of life. She said to Nalini, "What a lot of work I did when I was of your age! And yet I could find time to repeat my Mantra a hundred thousand times every day." That is indeed a tremendous performance by any exacting ascetic standard.

Beyond a few glimpses of this kind, we have little record of the Master's spiritual instructions to her and the way in which he imparted them. The Holy Mother seldom spoke on this subject to others. But we know for certain that the Master's teachings had a tremendous effect on her pure mind. To a disciple she gave a glimpse of her inner life in the following words: "During my days at Dakshineswar, I used to get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and sit in meditation. Often I used to be totally absorbed in it. Once,

on a moonlit night, I was performing Japa, sitting near the steps of the Nahabat. Everything was quiet. I did not even know when the Master passed that way. On other days I would hear the sound of his slippers, but on this night, I did not. I was totally absorbed in meditation. In those days I looked different. I used to put on ornaments and had a cloth with red border. On this day the cloth had slipped off from my back owing to a breeze, but I was unconscious of it. It seems 'son Yogen' went that way to give the water-jug to the Master and saw me in that condition. Ah! The ecstasy of those days! On moonlit nights I would look at the moon and pray with folded hands, 'May my heart be as pure as the rays of the yonder moon!' Or '0 Lord, there is stain even in the moon, but let there not be the least trace of stain in my mind!' If one is steady in meditation, one will clearly see the Lord in one's heart and hear His voice. The moment an idea flashes in the mind of such a one, it will be fulfilled then and there. You will be bathed in peace. Ah! What a mind I had at that time! Brinde, the maid servant, one day dropped a metal plate in front of me with a bang. The sound penetrated into my heart. In the fullness of one's spiritual realization, one will find that He, who resides in one's heart, resides in the heart of others as well-the oppressed, the persecuted, the untouchable and the out-caste. This realization makes one truly humble."

There is ample evidence to make one believe that she attained to exalted states of spiritual consciousness during this period of her life. But she was by nature so modest and unassuming that she would seldom speak to others of such facts of her life as might glorify her in their eyes. Sometimes certain happenings leaked out when any of her companions happened to be by her side. One such instance we come across in the account left by Yogin-Ma, of an exalted spiritual mood she witnessed personally in the Holy Mother. We give below her own words, a little abridged:

"When the Mother first came to Dakshineswar, she had not experienced Samadhi. Though she practised meditation and Japa every day with utmost devotion, we did not hear of her going into Samadhi at that time. On the other hand she even felt frightened at the sight of the Master's Samadhi in the days when she slept near him. After I had been acquainted with her for some time, she said to me one day, ‘Please speak to the Master that through his grace I may experience Samadhi. On account of the constant presence of devotees, I hardly get any opportunity to speak to him about it myself.' I thought it was quite right that I should convey to him her request.

"Next morning Sri Ramakrishna was seated on his bed alone when I went to his room and, after saluting him in the usual way, I communicated the Mother's prayer to him. He listened to it, but did not give any reply. Suddenly he became very serious. When he was in that mood, no one dared to utter a word before him. So I left the room after sitting there silently for a while. Coming to the Nahabat, I found the Mother seated for her daily worship. I opened the door a little and peeped in. Strange to say, she was now giggling and the next moment weeping. This went on alternately for some time. Tears were rolling down her cheeks in an unceasing stream. Gradually she became very much withdrawn into herself. I knew she was in Samadhi. So I closed the door and came away.

“A long while after, I went again to her room. She asked me. 'Are you just returning from the Master's room?' I replied, ‘How is it Mother, that you say you never experience Samadhi and other high spiritual moods?' She was abashed and smiled.

"After that event sometimes I used to spend the night with her at Dakshineswar. Though I wanted to sleep on a separate bed, she would never listen to it. She would drag me to her side. One night somebody was playing the flute outside. That brought on her a high spiritual mood. She was laughing at intervals. With great hesitation I sat in one corner of the bed. I thought that, 'being a worldly person, I should not touch her at that time. After long while, her mind came to the ordinary state."

In later days, after the passing away of the Master, she had more frequent experiences of this exalted state. This will be dealt with in detail in the proper place. Suffice it to say here that soon after her contact with the Master, her mind, pure and disciplined as it was, attained to great heights of concentration and illumination. Ecstasies and visions are only the by-products of spiritual realization. They may or may not appear according to an aspirant's temperament. The essence of realization, however, consists in a transformation of the inner life, and not in any external manifestation. The Holy Mother was speaking from experience when she put this idea so beautifully in the following words: "What else does one obtain by realization of God? Does one grow a pair of horns? No, our mind becomes pure, and through that pure mind, comes enlightenment."

In conclusion it may be stated here that the training that the Master imparted to her did not exclude secular matters, especially the way of conducting

oneself in everyday life, He instructed her that in arranging articles of domestic use, one must think out beforehand where particular things were to be kept. Those that were frequently required must be kept near at hand and the others at a distance. When a thing was temporarily removed from a place, particular care should be taken to see that it was put back exactly in the same place, so that one might not fail to locate it even in darkness. He taught her also the way of rolling wicks, dressing vegetables, making betel rolls, cooking, and doing other items of domestic work. He instructed her that while travelling in a boat or a carriage she should always be the first to get in and the last to get out; for then only one could properly check whether the entire luggage had been taken in or taken out. The secret of one's success in social relationships, he told her, depended entirely on one's capacity to adjust one's conduct according to time, place, circumstances and the nature of the people one had to deal with. Physically everyone was made of flesh and bones, but the mind within was constituted in entirely different ways. So one should be very careful in selecting one's friends and associates. With some, one might mix freely, with others only a nodding acquaintance was advisable, and with still others it was better not to talk at all.

Thus the Master took pains to make the Holy Mother efficient in both spiritual and secular matters, and prepared her for the great mission that he was to entrust to her at the close of his life.

The Mother as a true Sahadharmini

By careful education he helped to make her a true Sahadharmini, a fellow-seeker in the quest for the higher values of life. It was the resuscitation of the Vedic ideal of the Pativrata, according to which man and woman got fused into a common ideal and purpose in life. The man and the woman, brought together as husband and wife, are like the two wheels of a vehicle moving together on a common track towards a common ideal. Dharma is that path of higher evolution, and the discharge of one's social and spiritual duties in the scripture-ordained way is the way of progress along at. The Sahadharmini of a spiritually oriented personage like Sri Ramakrishna must necessarily be one with that same outlook, if the objective of that ideal is to be fulfilled. It was because of this mutually complementary nature of their characters, that they have become perfect ideals of both the married state and the monastic values.

An examination of several incidents of the Master's life would amply prove that this idea was always in his mind. The extraordinary way in which their marriage was arranged has already been narrated. It is known from the Master's own statement that he had prayed to the Divine Mother to free Sarada from all bodily passions and make her a suitable mate for himself. It was found that this prayer was amply answered when, after Sarada's arrival at Dakshineswar, the Master pointedly put her a question: "Do you want to drag me down into Maya?" Sarada Devi's answer was equally prompt and to the point. She replied: "Why should I do so? I have come only to help you in the path of religious life." A noble answer indeed by a Pativrata and a true Sahadharmini! Only a woman of immaculate purity of mind could have given such a reply. There was no artifice in it, no hypocrisy or attempt to please anybody. It was the spontaneous expression of her lofty nature, of the lofty ideal of life that had unconsciously become hers as much as her husband's.

The seriousness and sincerity behind this challenging reply she proved before long when Sri Ramakrishna decided to subject himself to what may be called a fiery ordeal. His teacher Totapuri had told him, on knowing him to be married, that this was not much of a risk for him. For a sincere Sadhaka, an earnest aspirant struggling in the spiritual path, it is highly necessary to keep aloof from the company of women. But if and when he attains to realization, his moral purity will not be of the cloistered type based on difference, but on the apprehension of the one Self in man and woman alike-an apprehension which helps one to surmount the identification of the self with the body.

The Master therefore utilized the presence of Sarada Devi at Dakshineswar to allow her the right of a wife in the fullest sense as well as to test how far his Brahman-knowledge had raised him above the bodily sense. For a period of about six months this ascetic of ascetics had his wife sleep in his own room and the spiritual awareness of them both put to the acid test. They stood it wonderfully well. The Master's mind went only into deep Samadhi and was never assaulted by bodily passion. He also gave equal credit to Sarada Devi when he said: "Had she not been so pure, who knows whether I would not have lost my self-control? After marriage I had prayed to the Divine Mother, ' O Mother! Remove even the least trace of carnality from the mind of my wife.' When I lived with her, I understood that the Mother had really granted my prayer."

And as for the Holy Mother herself, we have her statement regarding her experiences of those memorable nights: "The divine state, in which the Master used to be absorbed, passes all description. In an ecstatic mood, he would smile or weep, or at times remain perfectly still in Samadhi. This would sometimes continue throughout the night. In that divine presence, my whole body would tremble with awe and I would anxiously await the dawn. For I knew nothing of ecstasy in those days. One night his Samadhi continued for a very long time. Greatly frightened, I sent for Hriday. He came and began to repeat the name of the Lord in the Master's ears. When he had done this for a little while, external consciousness reappeared. After this incident, the Master came to know of my difficulty, and taught me the appropriate names that should be uttered in the ear in particular states of Samadhi. Thenceforth my fear was very much lessened, as he would invariably come to earthly consciousness on the utterance of the particular divine names. But even after this I sometimes kept awake the whole night, as there was no knowing when he would fall into Samadhi. In course of time he came to know of my difficulty. He learnt that even after the lapse of a considerable length of time I could not adjust myself to his Samadhi temperament. So he asked me to sleep separately at the Nahabat."

The Shodasi Pooja

Another memorable event in the life of this holy couple that took place about this time was the Shodasi Puja, in which the Master offered actual ceremonial worship to the Holy Mother, seating her on the pedestal of the Deity. It took place during her first visit to Dakshineswar when she stayed there continuously from March 1872 to October 1873, for more than a year and a half. Authorities differ about the exact date of this incident. According to some it was about a month and a half after the Mother's arrival at Dakshineswar; according to others it was one and a half years later. The latter is more likely. It took place on the night of Phalaharini-Kali Puja day, when the Divine Mother is worshipped as the consumer of the Karmas of the devotee. Arrangements for worship were made in the Master's room, and Sarada was requested to be present at the worship. After the Master had gone through the preliminary rites of worship, he beckoned to Sarada Devi to sit on the seat set apart for the Deity. He then invoked the presence of the Divine Mother in her with the Mantra: “O Divine Mother! Thou eternal virgin, the mistress of all powers, and the abode of all beauty! Deign to unlock for me the gate to perfection. Sanctifying the body and mind of this woman, do Thou manifest Thyself through her and do what is auspicious."

Then he went through all the procedures of a full ritualistic worship with sixteen ingredients. He first performed the Nyasa, which consists in touching the different parts of one's body with appropriate Mantras and identifying them in meditation with the corresponding parts of the Deity. After that he offered worship with sixteen items with appropriate Mantras. In the course of it he applied a red paint to the soles of Sarada Devi, put a vermilion mark on her forehead, put on her a new cloth, put a little of sweets and betel-leaf in her mouth, and performed the Arati (light-waving ceremony) before her. The bashful Sarada received all these acts of adoration without the least feeling of hesitation. The sense of identification with the Deity must have come on her. Both the Master and the Mother were in a state of ecstatic and semi-conscious absorption in the course of the worship, and by the time it came to an end they were in complete Samadhi in which the worshipper and the worshipped realised the identity of their being as Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. After a considerable length of time, when the second watch of the night had fairly advanced, the Master regained external consciousness. Then he resigned himself completely to the Divine Mother, and in a supreme act of consecration, offered to the Deity manifest before him, the fruits of his austerities, his rosary, himself and everything that was his. He then uttered the following Mantra: "O Goddess, I prostrate myself before Thee again and again-before Thee, the eternal consort of Siva, the three-eyed, the golden-hued, the indwelling spirit in all, the giver of refuge, the accomplisher of every end, and the most auspicious among all auspicious objects."

The significance of this rite in the lives of these two great personages can hardly be over-estimated. For Sri Ramakrishna it signified the final triumph of the spirit over the body, and the recognition of Divinity in all. It marked the successful conclusion of his spiritual strivings, and his establishment in the state of the 'divine man.' In the life of Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother, too, it had a deep significance. When Sri Ramakrishna, the Divine Incarnation of the age, invoked the presence of the Divine Mother in her, and worshipped her as such, she was elevated in truth and in reality from Sarada, the daughter of Ramachandra, to Sarada, the Holy Mother, the manifestation of the Eternal Mother of the Universe, for all humanity to worship. It has been already stated how the Master had from the time of his marriage been praying to the Mother of the Universe to divinise the person of his wife, and how her answer to a leading question he put to her as a test proved that the transformation was largely effected, and how she was a partner in life well-matched with him in all respects. And now by the

performance of this rite of Shodasi Puja in which he identified the Deity with Sarada, and surrendered all his spiritual practices and their fruits to her, he virtually made her a participant of all his austerities and spiritual attainments. It is sometimes asked why the Holy Mother did not perform Sadhanas like the Master. She did perform much in this field, but the real answer is in the Shodasi Puja, by virtue of which the Holy Mother became a full sharer in the spiritual glory of the Master. As the spiritual counterpart of the great world-teacher Sri Ramakrishna, she had no need to re-enact the same scenes of the one common drama which they were together staging before mankind. She had other parts to play by way of fulfilling and supplementing the Master's work.

In another sense also the Shodasi Puja was a landmark in her life. It made her a vital part of Sri Ramakrishna's Mission.

In that rite the Master invoked in her the presence of the Divine Mother- the same Supreme Energy that was manifesting in him. Henceforth, just as in the Master's case, her body and mind became the venue of expression for that Energy. For the rest of her life she served the Master and helped in his Mission, and after his passing away, his mantle fell on her, and through a long period of spiritual ministry, she completed what he had left unfinished.

Relationship of Mutual Love and Respect

The Master's life combined in itself the highest ideals of the monastic life and those of the householders. The Master always taught men the gospel of renunciation of Kamini-Kanchana (translated literally as 'Woman and Gold', but meaning 'lust and greed') and had it not been for the advent of the Holy Mother into his life, he would have been taken to be only a hard-baked ascetic and nothing more. But his very cordial and affectionate relationship with the Mother, treating her as the first and foremost of his disciples and attendants, has lifted married life above the level of sex and made it a potent spiritual relationship. The crusader against 'Kamini-Kanchana', showed the highest consideration and respect to the Holy Mother. The welcome he extended to her on her first appearance was in itself an unexpected mark of cordiality. Not only was he particular about keeping her in comfort, he even thought of providing something for her future. Calculating the minimum amount required monthly for her maintenance as Rupees six, he had six hundred rupees deposited with the Zamindari Office of Balaram Bose, the interest of which was to go for her maintenance. He divined her liking to

wear ornaments and spent three hundred rupees to have a pair of bracelets made for her. There is a tradition according to which Sri Ramakrishna had a vision of Sita at the Panchavati. He found her wearing a pair of bracelets with many tiny facets like diamonds. It was in imitation of these that he made for her gold bracelets which she wore till the last. Yogin-Ma, describing her appearance in those early days, says: "She wore a piece of cloth with broad red borders and put vermilion at the parting of her hair. Her thick black tresses almost touched her knees. She wore a gold necklace, a big nose ling, earrings and bracelets. Most of these were what Mathur Babu made for the Master when he practised spiritual disciplines assuming the role of a handmaid of the Divine Mother." It seems Manomohan's wife criticised her for wearing these ornaments while being the wife of a man of such great renunciation. Thenceforth she put aside most of them.

While receiving all her loving services, and moving with her in all frankness and child-like innocence, the Master always maintained an attitude of profound respect towards her as his spiritual counterpart and fulfiller of his life's Mission. This attitude was generally implicit, but sometimes expressed itself in striking little actions. One day the Holy Mother entered the Master's room with his meal. He thought it was his niece Lakshmi, and asked her casually to shut the door, addressing her as 'tui', an expression meaning 'thou', but used with reference to juniors or inferior persons. When the Holy Mother responded, the Master felt very much embarrassed and said, "Ah! Is it you? I thought it was Lakshmi. Please pardon me." But the Holy Mother tried to pacify him, saying there was nothing wrong in his addressing her like that. But the Master was not satisfied. Next morning he went to the Nahabat and said to the Holy Mother: "Well, I could not sleep all the night. I was so worried because I spoke to you rudely." Referring to this incident, she often said in later times, especially when some of her senseless relations behaved disrespectfully, "I was married to a husband who never addressed me as 'tui'. Ah! How he I treated me! Not even once did he tell me a harsh word or wound my feelings. He did not strike me even with a bunch of flowers!"

It will thus be seen that Sri Sarada Devi received from her husband all that a Hindu wife expects. But some may perhaps object that she had no issue. Her own mother Shyamasundari Devi once lamented: "My Sarada has been married to an ascetic. She will never know the happiness of being addressed as 'mother'. The Master, who happened to hear it, remarked: "Your daughter will have so many children that she will be tired of being addressed day and

night as 'Mother'. And countless indeed were her spiritual 'sons' and 'daughters'. She was the Sahadharmini, a companion in life, not of an ordinary man, but of the Incarnation of the age, who came to generate Bhakti and Jnana among men, and whose main teaching inculcated renunciation of lust and possessions. In conformity with his ideal, which was hers too, the children born of her were not physical, but spiritual, and of these she had a countless number.

In the Passing of Events

The period of thirteen years that the Mother served the Great Master was inwardly characterised by her absorption in the Master's ideal and fusion of her life with his, and outwardly by her periodic migration from Dakshineswar to Jayrambati and back. During this period she went seven times to Jayrambati and back to Calcutta, a journey of about sixty miles, which she had often to make on foot. These visits were generally occasioned by ill health or for rendering assistance to her mother during the Jagaddhatri Puja. But as her services were very much needed by the Master, her stay at Jayrambati was perforce not very long. In 1874 her father died and her mother and brothers were reduced to poverty. The family had to be supported by her mother with wages earned by husking paddy, in which she was helped by her daughter Sarada also whenever she was at Jayrambati. After the performance of Jagaddhatri Puja was instituted in the family, their condition improved.

It was during one of these journeys to Calcutta that the Mother had to run the risk of facing some brigands after dusk. As she could not walk fast enough, the party she was accompanying had gone in advance, and she was left alone at about dusk half way across a solitary wilderness. A man who looked like a brigand and his wife converged on her path and halted her. In that precarious situation, the Mother, then a young woman of about twenty-four, did not lose her presence of mind. . She addressed the couple as 'father' and 'mother' in a tone that roused the parental instinct in them and she narrated to them how she had been left in that helpless condition. The 'brigand' couple, reciprocated the filial confidence she put in them; and behaved in a very' tender manner towards her. They took good care of her for the night, and enabled her to join her party in the morning.

During this period she once fell seriously ill. In 1875 she had a severe attack of dysentery, so severe that she was given up for lost. When all human

remedies failed, as a last and desperate act of prayer and supplication for divine intervention, she resolved to perform the rite of Hatya before the Deity Simhavahini, according to which one observes the vow of starving unto death if no divine assistance comes. Within a few days of her fast, the Goddess is said to have revealed the name of some simple medicines, taking which she was cured. Some time after, she had a severe attack of malaria, with enlargement of the spleen, for which she was subjected to the curious countryside treatment of branding with a red hot iron in the region of the spleen-with what effect, no one knows.

It was on her fourth visit to Dakshineswar along with her mother in 1881 that she had to return the very next day owing to the rude behaviour of Hriday, nephew and care-taker of the Master. But the injured feeling of the Mother had instantaneous repercussion on Hriday. A few days after this, he indiscreetly worshipped with flowers the feet of a young daughter of Trailokyanath, the proprietor of the temple. As such an act of worship was supposed to be very harmful to the girl concerned, her father dismissed Hriday from the temple service, with the order that he should no more enter the temple precincts. This was a corroboration of the warning that the Master had given to Hriday, who had been for sometime past behaving discourteously towards him. He had told him that one might insult him (the Master) with impunity, but "dire consequences" would follow, if the Holy Mother were so treated.

The Mother stayed at Dakshineswar till about September 1885, when her happy days there ended with the transfer of the Master for treatment, first to Shyampukur in Calcutta, and after-wards to Cossipore, where he passed away in August 1886. While the men disciples arranged for the nursing and general treatment of the Master, the Holy Mother took upon herself the duty of preparing the diet of the Master and feeding him. Though for a Purdah lady like herself it was very inconvenient to stay in those places, she put up with everything with a sense of satisfaction derived from the feeling that she was of service to the Master, and she threw herself heart and soul into the work.

There are two incidents of importance recorded about the Holy Mother's experiences during her attendance on the Master at Cossipore. The Master was then lying in a weak and exhausted condition, unable to move without the assistance of others. But one day the Holy Mother saw him running out of the room. Startled, the Mother went inside the room to verify her

observation, and she found the Master's cot empty. Shortly after, she found him returning. She made enquiries of him about this the next day. The Master at first made light of it, saying it was all the result of her heated brain. But when she pressed for an explanation, he informed her that Niranjan and some other disciples had gone to make palm juice from a date palm, that there was then a cobra on the palm, and that he went there in advance, using his higher powers, to drive away the cobra and protect them. This event, looking strange and miraculous, has to be accepted as it comes from the Mother's lips. It also raises interesting issues regarding the Master's ailment.

Another occurrence was her experience at Tarakeswar Siva Temple where she had gone to pray and seek Divine remedy for the Master's illness, which had been declared incurable by medical men. For two days she lay before the Deity without food or drink, supplicating for some remedy. During the night of the second day she was startled to hear a sound resembling the breaking of a pile of earthen pots at one blow. She woke up from her torpor, and the idea flashed in her mind: "Who is husband and who is wife? Who is my relative in this world? Why am I about to kill myself?" Freed from all personal attachments, her mind was full of an intense spirit of renunciation. She had another vision in which she saw that the image of Mother Kali was bent to one side. When she asked the Deity, "Mother, why do you stand like that?" she got the reply, "It is because of this (pointing to the Master's diseased throat). I also have it in my throat" All such experiences prepared her mind for the exit of the Master from his earthly sojourn, which took place on the 16th August, 1886. With the passing of the Master, this phase of the Mother's life came to a close.

After the Master's Passing: Pilgrimage to Vrindaban

The Master's demise brought about a drastic change in the Holy Mother's life. She reacted to his passing with extreme fortitude, exclaiming, "O Mother Kali! Have you left me!' She shed no tears, though her heart was heavy with the sorrow of separation. Soon after the cremation, she was removing her gold bracelets and tearing off the red border of her wearing cloth in order to be dressed in the pattern of a Hindu widow. Immediately she had a vision of the Master, telling her, "What are you doing? I have not gone away. I have only passed from one room to another." A reassuring experience indeed for her grief-stricken heart! All through life she wore her

bracelets and a thin-bordered cloth in acceptance of the assurance of her experience that her Lord and Master is the Eternal Being, who never dies.

About a fortnight after the Master's Mahasamadhi, the Cossipore establishment was disbanded, and the Holy Mother had to shift to the house of Balaram Bose. As a measure for assuaging her grief and as a holy act in itself, she started, about two weeks later, on a pilgrimage with a party consisting of several disciples of the Master including Lakshmi-Didi and Golap-Ma. After visiting Banaras and Ayodhya, they halted at Vrindaban where they stayed for about a year. The stay was a very highly rewarding experience from the spiritual standpoint for the Holy Mother. The association of the place with the story of Radha's passionate grief in separation from her beloved Krishna brought home to her the similarity of her own situation after the Master's passing, and added a spiritual poignancy to the sorrow she was feeling in her heart from the bereavement. All her pent up feelings found expression as an upsurge of passionate longing for the Divine and in a torrential flow of tears that continued almost unremittingly during the early part of her life at Vrindaban. This mood in which love and grief blend in full harmony bringing about a gradual transformation of personality, continued for several days with her until she had a wonderful vision in which the Master appeared to her and said: "Why are you weeping so much? Here I am. Where have I after all gone? Only from one room to another." The experience assuaged her grief very much, as she began to feel the nearness of the Master more and more. The anguish of separation gradually turned into a sense of utter peace and radiant joy. Often she began to fall into exalted moods in which she would walk away over the sandy banks until her companions went after her and brought her back. Her temperament changed from that of an adult into that of a little girl of seven or eight.

Her life at Vrindaban was one of constant worship, meditation and spiritual experiences. She and Yogin-Ma would sit in meditation with such absorption that they ceased to be disturbed by flies that produced sores on their faces. She visited all the numerous temples in the place and also undertook the circumambulation of the whole area of Vrindaban involving a walk of several miles. At Radharamana's temple she prayed to the Deity: "O Lord, remove from me the habit of finding fault with others. May I never find fault with anybody." Her prayer was answered to the letter, and in later life one of the distinguishing features of her character was the complete

absence of the fault-finding tendency. She maintained that this tendency only corrupted one without improving others.

She had several spiritual experiences during this time, though she never revealed them to anyone. But some of them could not escape the notice of her companions. Thus Yogin-Ma one day found her absorbed in Samadhi. Even repeating the Divine name in her ears several times had not the effect of bringing her to the body-consciousness. Then Swami Yogananda tried the same technique for some time, which brought her to a semi-conscious state in which she said, "I must eat something'-even as Sri Ramakrishna used to mutter in order to bring his mind to the worldly plane. She then partook of a little sweet as the Master would do. Even in taking betel rolls, she threw away the tip in the manner of the Master. Swami Yogananda put to her several questions in that mood, and received replies from her as if the Master himself were answering him. Afterwards she told her companions that the consciousness of the Master was upon her during that state. During this period she gave initiation to Swami Yogananda under the express command of the Master both to her and to the Swami. She gave the initiation in a highly exalted mood bordering on Samadhi. After visiting Haridwar and some other places, she along with the party returned to Calcutta by August 1887.

Life at Kamarpukur and after

The nine months following 1887 may be described as the dark period in the Holy Mother's life from the material point of view, although spiritually she was in an exalted mood. Now that the Master was no more, the Holy Mother could not stay on in Calcutta. She was a young widow of about thirty-three. Though the Sannyasin disciples of the Master and a few of the lay ones respected her, men at large had not yet come to recognise her spiritual status. She had therefore to go through all the difficulties which a young widow in her situation was bound to face. A few days after her return to Calcutta from her pilgrimage, she had to go to Kamarpukur to take her permanent residence there. The Master too had told her towards the close of his life: "After my time, you go to Kamarpukur and live upon whatever you get, be it mere boiled rice and greens, and spend your time in repeating the name of Hari." These words of his came to be literally fulfilled. She took her residence in the small cottage that had been assigned to the Master in the family campus. For her maintenance she had only some paddy which she could process into rice and eat without any condiments. For something to eat

with rice, she had herself to dig the ground and grow some greens. She had absolutely no cash even to procure some salt. Ramlal, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, who was legally her guardian, left her in utter neglect. It is said that he even positively contributed to her sufferings. The temple authorities had set apart a monthly pension of ten rupees to the Master which used to be paid to the Mother. But Ramlal, for reasons of his own, is supposed to have interfered and got it stopped. He even effected a partition, and assigning the Master's cottage to her, rid himself of all responsibilities. The other members of the family like Sivaram and Lakshmi-Didi were of no help to her, as they stayed at Calcutta with their uncle Ramlal who was the officiating priest at Dakshineswar. She had therefore to live alone in that hut. To add to the misery that neglect and loneliness caused, she became the butt of criticism of the village die-hards who vilified her as a 'merry widow' because she put on a red bordered cloth which custom strictly prohibited for widows. In the midst of, these depressing influences, there were two factors that sustained "her. One was the sympathy and support she got from Prasannamayi, an aged lady of the Laha family and a friend of Sri Ramakrishna when he was the boy Gadadhar of Kamarpukur. The other was the vision of the Great Master which she got now and then in difficult situations and the mood of spiritual exaltation in which she lived.

This state of affairs did not, however, continue for long. Her mother Shyamasundari Devi came to know of it, and through her son Prasanna Kumar, she remonstrated with Ramlal for the neglect of her daughter and also informed Golap-Ma of it. Golap-Ma at once took up the matter seriously, carried on a vigorous propaganda among the disciples of the Master, raised some funds, and invited the Holy Mother in the name of all the devotees of the Master to come to Calcutta and stay there. After some hesitation, arising from fear of public opinion attributing impropriety to a young widow staying amidst strangers, she finally arrived in Calcutta in April 1888 to the great joy of all the disciples and devotees.

It has to be pointed out that in the early days, several of the lay disciples attached no more importance to the Holy Mother than as the 'Wife of the Guru'. One is said to have actually remarked: "I know Sri Ramakrishna, but I know nothing of his wife." But hearing much from Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma and Swami Yogananda about the highly exalted states of the Mother at Vrindaban, most of them veered round in their estimate of the Mother, and fully co-operated in the efforts made to provide for her stay at Calcutta.

From now (1888) onwards till her exit in 1920, the Mother stayed at Calcutta and Jayrambati alternately. She went to Kamarpukur also a few times in the early part of this period. At Calcutta she used to be accommodated at the houses of the devotees Balaram Bose or Mahendranath Gupta whenever her stay was short, and at rented houses when the stay was long. This arrangement went on until Swami Saradananda built the Udbodhan House as her Calcutta residence in 1909. She was attended upon by Swami Yogananda and Swami Trigunatita at first, and after Swami Trigunatita left India, Swami Saradananda took full charge of her responsibility. The lady disciples of the Master like Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma kept company with her often.

It was a few months after her coming to Calcutta, that she went on another pilgrimage in April 1888 to Gaya accompanied by Swami Advaitananda. On this occasion she also visited Bodh Gaya, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, where an event of great future significance took place. She saw there the well established monastery of Hindu Sannyasins, which provided the monks with good accommodation and food. The contrast between this and the poverty-stricken condition of her own 'children', the monastic disciples of the Master, evoked strong sentiments in her mind. About this incident she said as follows: "Ah! For this have I shed tears and prayed to the Master! And only through that this Math (Belur Math) came into existence now. When the Master left the body, the boys gave up the world and gathered together in a rented shelter for some days. Then they scattered about independently and went on roaming about here and there. Then I felt intensely sad and prayed to the Master, 'O Lord! You came, disported with a few and then went away. Should everything end with that? If so, what was the need for coming down and undergoing so many travails? I have seen in Banaras and Vrindaban many holy men who get their food by alms and move about from one place to another. There is no dearth of holy men of that type. I shall not be able to bear the sight of my 'sons', who have come out in your name, moving about begging for food. My prayer is that those who leave the world in your name may never be in need of bare sustenance. They will all live together holding to your ideas and ideals, and the people afflicted by the worries of the world will resort to them and be solaced by hearing from them about you.

That is why you came. My heart is pained at seeing them wandering about' “Indeed a remarkable prayer for the monks, while she herself was in utter poverty and neglect! Her insight into the implications of the Master's advent

too is profound and prophetic.

The Exalted State of the Mother's Mind

From the time of her return to Calcutta from Kamarpukur in 1888, her visits to that place were few, although she took care to see that the house that stood in the Master's name was kept in good condition. Her time was taken up by frequent visits to, and stay at, her paternal home at Jayrambati, and with disciples at Calcutta. Her companions Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma noticed a great spiritual transformation in her after the Master's lifetime. Yogin-Ma noticed that she had become remarkably indrawn and was radiating an unearthly loveliness. During her stay at Calcutta in 1888, she saw the Mother in a state of Samadhi while meditating on the roof of Balaram Babu's house. About her experience in that state, the Mother said: "I found in that state that I had travelled into a distant country. I cannot describe the nature of the ecstatic joy I felt. When my mind came down from that exalted mood, I found my body lying there. I thought, 'How can I possibly enter into this ugly body?' I could not at all persuade my mind to do so. After a long while it did, and the body became conscious again."

Another day she was meditating in the house of Nilambar Mukherjee along with Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma. After finishing her meditation, Yogin-Ma looked at the Mother and found her seated motionless as before, absorbed in meditation. It took a long time for her mind to come down to physical consciousness, and when it actually regained traces of it, she began to say, "O Yogin! Where are my hands and feet?" Yogin-Ma pressed her limbs and directed her attention to them in a loud voice, but it took much time for her to be conscious of the whole body.

Another vision she had was of Sri Ramakrishna getting down into the Ganga and his body dissolving into its sacred waters She found Narendra taking that water and sprinkling it everywhere

This was a prophetic vision of what was to take place soon-of Narendra as Swami Vivekananda spreading the Master's universal message broadcast. The vision created a very vivid impression on her, for it filled her mind with a sense of purpose. She began to see that the Master lived in his Mission and that he worked through those whom he made his instruments in its fulfilment. Her own part in it began to dawn on her mind little by little.

It would thus be seen that after the Master's demise, in spite of various worldly difficulties, her mind was getting more and more detached from worldly concerns and was drifting towards Samadhi. So long as the Master was alive, serving him in every way filled her life with a meaning. But once he was no more, there was no other definite worldly purpose to hold her consciousness to the body, and Samadhi became a more frequent experience with her. Thus, it was the firm view of her close associates like Yogin-Ma that she would have given up her body soon in the absence of a worldly purpose, and her services in the great work of propagation of the Master's message would not have been available, had it not been for certain domestic entanglements that forced her mind back to the world

Radhu and her significance in the Mother's Life

The force that diverted her mind to the world was the entry of Radhu or Radhi, a niece of hers, into her life. To understand the nature of this connection, it is necessary to have some acquaintance with the domestic set up in the Holy Mother's paternal home at Jayrambati, with which she became intimately connected after she left Kamarpukur. That family consisted of her mother Shyamasundari Devi and her four sons-.Prasanna Kumar, Barada Prasad, Kali Kumar and Abhay Charan, who were all called 'uncles' (Mamas) by the devotees. Being the eldest of the family, the Holy Mother had much to do in her early days in the upbringing of these brothers of hers, and therefore there was a strong tie of affection uniting her with them. None of these brothers had any of the great spiritual qualities that distinguished the Holy Mother, but grew into just the ordinary men of the world, and some of them even represented an extreme type of worldliness. None of them except the last had enough talents to prosper in life. All of them and their children looked to the Mother for help, and on account of this, there was bitter rivalry among them for the Mother's favour. So in her later days at Jayrambati she was in the midst of this not very pleasant domestic environment on the one hand, and on the other, in the midst of her all-renouncing monastic attendants and highly devoted lay disciples. The picture of the Holy Mother in the midst of this contrasting environment is that of one living a life of utter detachment and renunciation, discharging at the same time whatever duties she had to perform to her kith and kin.

Among her brothers, the youngest Abhay Charan was the most talented, but in the end he became the cause of the devolution of heavy responsibilities on the Mother. He passed out of the Medical School, but died all of a sudden,

leaving behind him his expectant widow who was a little unbalanced in mind. The brother made a dying request to the sister that she should take complete charge of his weak wife and her expected child, and she agreed. The child born of this 'mad aunt' was Radhu or Radhi, on whom the Mother pinned her affection, and who thus became that prop spoken of earlier, for sustaining her life in this world.

This interpretation of the Radhu episode is not any fanciful exaggeration by devotees. Antecedent events amply justify it. It was also the Mother's conviction. To quote her own words: "How the Master has entangled me through Radhu! After the passing away of the Master, I did not at all relish anything in life. I became utterly indifferent to worldly things and kept on praying, 'What shall I achieve by remaining in this world?' At that time I saw a girl ten or twelve years old walking in front of me dressed in red cloth. The Master pointed her out to me and said: 'Cling to her as a support. Many children (disciples) seeking instruction will come to you.' The next moment he disappeared. I did not see the girl anymore. Later on I was seated in this very place. At that time Radhu's mother was stark mad. She was dragging some rags tucked under her arms. I said to myself, 'Well if I do not look after this child, who else will take care of her? She has no father, and her mother is an insane woman.' No sooner had I taken the child in my arms than I saw the Master. He said ‘This is the girl, cling to her as your support. She is Yoga-maya, the illusive power.' "

Radhu was born in 1900. From that time till 1920, the year of the Holy Mother's demise, she was the fulcrum on which the worldly life of the Holy Mother rested. After the above-mentioned vision the Holy Mother took charge of Radhu. She never allowed Radhu to be parted from her till a few days before her demise in 1920. She could neither eat nor sleep without Radhu, so strong was the bond of affection with which she came to be tied to this girl all of a sudden. She practically assumed the role of her mother, ousting the girl's own insane mother, the Chota-Mami, who made it the ground of her tirades against the Mother in later days. She became jealous of the Holy Mother when she found her daughter loving the Mother more than herself, and her insane imagination began to find various evil motives in the Mother's love for Radhu, as a result of which she began to behave to the Mother with a rudeness verging on persecution.

Radhu, too, proved, as she grew up, to be somewhat abnormal like her mother. Physically she was weak and mentally a moron. Though there was a

simplicity and innocence about her, -she was utterly lacking in understanding and discrimination. The Mother arranged for her marriage in 1911, but even after that she and her husband continued to be with the Mother. Her first confinement was a period of great anxiety for the Mother, as the girl was practically insane before and after the event.

The Mother in domestic and devotional setting

Besides Radhu and her insane mother, there were also Nalini and Maku, the two daughter of her brother Prasanna Kumar, who were also dependent on the Holy Mother. They stayed with her at the Jayrambati house, and often moved with her to Calcutta also, after Swami Saradananda built Udbodhan House in 1909 as the Calcutta residence of the Mother.

So in the scenario of the latter part of her life, which is meticulously depicted in these memoirs, one will find the Holy Mother amidst the circle of these relatives-her brothers described here as Mamas (uncles), their wives as Mamis (aunts), her nieces Nalini and Maku as Didis (elder sisters), and above all Radhu who is the central figure in this whole domestic set up. The selfishness of the brothers, the mutual jealousy of the nieces, Nalini's mania for ceremonial purity, the perversity of Radhu, and the insanity of Radhu's mother, all these together combine to produce a tangled domestic situation, in the intolerable atmosphere of which the Mother had to carry on her self-chosen duty without demur, sustained by her matchless patience, insight and power of detachment.

It is not that even some of her intimate associates did not feel the contradiction between her attachment to Radhu and other relatives, and the state of renunciation inculcated by the Master. Her very close friend Yogin-Ma was one such She thought: "The Master was a man of such high renunciation and we see the Holy Mother behaving like a typical worldly-minded woman.

Day and night she is restless about her brothers, nephews and nieces. I don't understand it" Shortly after this doubt had arisen in her mind, she was one day meditating on the bank of the Ganges, when she saw in a vision the Master standing before her and saying, "Look there! Don't you see something floating on the Ganges?" She saw a new-born baby, entangled in its entrails, being carried along by the current. The Master then said to her, "Can anything ever make the Ganges impure? Can anything defile its

waters? Regard her (the Holy Mother) too in the same way. Never have any doubt about her. Know that she and this (referring to himself) are identical."

In striking contrast to this domestic circle around her, were the numerous spiritual aspirants who had been gathering about her. Originally consisting of Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma and some of the other women devotees of the Master, their numbers swelled with the addition of her own disciples whose number increased as her spiritual ministry gained momentum. Very senior Sannyasins of the older generation like Swami Yogananda, Swami Trigunatita and Swami Saradananda attended on her, besides several monastic disciples of her own. Countless numbers of initiation-seeking devotees also went to her both at Calcutta and at Jayrambati. They were all spiritual seekers who sought no worldly advantage from the Mother, but only an opportunity to offer her their service and whatever resources they had. It is a remarkable thing that the Holy Mother was able to satisfy both these types-her exacting and quarrelsome relatives on the one hand, and the devoted spiritual seekers on the other. In this sense she was really a Bhukti-mukti-pradayini—a descriptive epithet for the Divine Mother, meaning granter of both worldly goods and spiritual emancipation. The unique spirituality of the Mother can be recognised only when one comprehends the inherent contradictions of the demands that these two situations made on her. One who is doting on an eccentric niece—how could such a person bestow unrestricted and absolute maternal love even on utter strangers, not to speak of one's disciples, and overwhelm them with the power and sincerity of it? This looks an insoluble mystery. But it is also a pointer to the lofty spiritual status of the Mother. None but one who is established in what is called Bhavamukha in the great Master’s teaching, is capable of it. For it is the nature of worldly love that the more one loves one's kith and kin, the less becomes one's concern for others. But here the Mother's universal love stands undiminished even when it is diverted through diverse and contrary channels. The comprehensiveness and intensity of it is not at all affected by its bestowal on certain restricted circles also. These precious reminiscences about her vividly portray in variegated colours the scenes of the Mother pouring her astounding love on strangers, on criminals, on the rich, on the poor, on the sick and the suffering, on spiritual aspirants and on saints all alike, even while living amidst relatives with their exacting demands for worldly advantages.

Important Events of later Life

Let us resume the thread of the events of her life. During this period of her life from 1888 to 1920, her time was mostly divided between Jayrambati and Calcutta besides what she spent on short pilgrimages. Thus in April 1888 itself she went to Gaya and in November 1888 to the temples of Puri, both being places which the Master had not visited and to which he had advised her to go. In 1893 she performed the Panchatapa, an austere practice in which one has to subject oneself to the heat of five fires, these being four fires on the four sides with the hot sun above. In 1894 she again went to Banaras and Vrindaban. In November 1898 the first of her monastic attendants Swami Yogananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, as also her own youngest brother Abhay Charan passed away, to the great sorrow of the Holy Mother. In 1900 was born Radhu or Radharani who became the prop of her life thenceforth. In 1906 her mother Shyamasundari Devi passed away.

The year 1909 was a great landmark in the Holy Mother's life, because that year saw the opening of the Udbodhan House Ever since Swami Saradananda took up the responsibility of the Holy Mother after the demise of Swami Yogananda, he was feeling the great inconvenience the Mother felt in being lodged in Calcutta in rented houses or in devotees residences, especially because with the passing of time, her entourage increased in number. So, raising a loan, the Swami built a city house for her in the Baghbazar area. It was called Udbodhan Office, because the Udbodhan, the Bengali magazine of the Ramakrishna Order was published from there. In the upper storeys of the house the Mother and the ladies of her party stayed, while on the ground floor her monastic attendants and other disciples stayed. Swami Saradananda stayed in a room at the entrance as the 'gate keeper' of the Mother. While the Mother stayed at Calcutta, Swami Saradananda met all the expenses of her and her party. When she went to her village home with the ladies, Swami Saradananda put one monastic in charge of her to look after her safety and convenience. He also sent substantial contributions of money, though the Mother herself was supposed to meet the expenses of her household in the village with contributions from disciples and devotees.

At Jayrambati she stayed at the houses of one or the other of her brothers, until Swami Saradananda built a separate cottage-for her. The city folk could meet her at Calcutta easily, but such meetings could be very formal only. On the other hand when she was at her village home, she was readily accessible and mixed freely with the devotees. So, many preferred to meet her in the village. As their numbers increased, a separate establishment for her became

necessary. The Ashrama at Koalpara situated about five or six miles from Jayrambati, provided a mid-way resting place for the Mother on her journey to Jayrambati. The monastic disciples of the Mother who stayed there looked upon themselves as the out-post to guard and serve the Mother through manual labour, shopping, going on errands etc.

Pilgrimage to Rameswaram

Towards the end of February 1911, the Holy Mother started on a pilgrimage to Rameswaram, the trip being organised by Swami Ramakrishnananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and head of the Madras Centre. In spite of the language difficulty, she freely communicated with people and during her stay of a month in the city of Madras, gave initiation to several devotees. From Madras she went to Rameswaram where she was allowed the unusual privilege of entering the sanctum sanctorum and worshipping the Deity with her own hands. Returning from Rameswaram, she visited Bangalore towards the end of March, where also the President of that Ashrama Swami Nirmalananda, extended a very hearty and respectful reception to her. Her stay at Bangalore created a great enthusiasm among the people. On her way back to Calcutta she halted at Rajahmundry for a holy bath in the Godavari. She reached Calcutta back on 11th April, 1911. One more pilgrimage she undertook, and that was her third visit to Banaras, extending from November 1912 to January 1913. She went with a fairly big party consisting of monks, devotees and some relatives.

Spiritual Ministry

Her life from 1888 up to her demise in 1920 was one of active spiritual ministry. The Master had commanded her to carry on the work he had started. Speaking on this point, she said: “I have received all these Mantras from the Master himself. Through these, one is sure to achieve perfection." In his last days at Cossipore, Sri Ramakrishna said to her feelingly: "Well, won't you do something? Am I to do all?" To this the Holy Mother replied, "I am but a woman. What can I do?" But the Master replied: "No, no, you have much to do." The Master's vision, in this respect was prophetic. She was his partner in life and in ideals, and he left her in this world to continue and add momentum to the work of spiritual regeneration of man that he had started.

Her spiritual ministry had begun, in a way, even during the life-time of the Master. Many of the women, who flocked to the Master, gathered round her and felt inspired by her. It is known that the Master himself asked his would-be Sannyasin disciple Sarada (Swami Trigunatita) to take initiation from her. But it is doubtful whether the initiation actually took place: but Swami Trigunatita was one of her earliest caretakers and attendants till he left for work in the West. Yogen, Swami Yogananda, another disciple of the Master, was initiated by her at Vrindaban according to the instruction given to her and Yogen by the Master himself in dreams.

During her stay at Jayrambati and Calcutta, the stream of initiation-seeking disciples increased from a trickle to a voluminous flow as time went on and the Master's name and message began to spread far and wide. She was very liberal in accepting disciples, without insisting too much on their competency, not because she could not assess the same, but because her motherly heart responded with sympathy and affection to whoever went to her calling 'Mother' and seeking refuge. In the ocean of her universal love, the relative statures of individual seekers had no meaning as far as their fitness to receive her blessings was concerned. Consequently the number of her disciples increased and many of them were not of any high standard of excellence. Referring to this, her companion Yogin-Ma once said: "Look at the Master's disciples. Each one of them is a spiritual giant. And look at your disciples, Mother." To this the Mother replied: "Is it to be wondered at? He picked up the best type, and with what care he selected them! And towards me he has pushed all this small fry, coming in their hundreds like ants! Don’t compare his disciples with mine," Further she spoke to one disciple about the significance of her initiation: "Whatever I have to give, I give at the time of initiation. If you want peace immediately, practise the spiritual discipline prescribed. Otherwise you will achieve it only after the fall of the body." Another disciple protested against her liberality, saying that she was giving initiation sometimes even to boys of ten and twelve who might not even remember the Mantra, and that the number of these was so many that she hardly remembered them. Her reply to this was: "My child, the Master never forbade me to do so. He instructed me on many matters. Could he not have told me something about this as well? I give the responsibility of my disciples to the Master. Every day pray to him, saying, 'Please look after the disciples wherever they may be.' Further I received these Mantras from the Master himself. Through them one is sure to achieve perfection,'"

Once when she was badly ill a disciple noticed her getting up at 2.00 a.m. So he asked her whether she was not sleeping well. Her reply was, "How can I, my child'! All these children come to me with much earnestness and take initiation, but most of them do not practise Japa regularly. Why regularly'? They do not do anything at all. But since I have taken their responsibility, should I not see to their welfare? Therefore I do Japa for their sake and pray to the Master constantly, saying, 'Oh Lord! Awaken their consciousness. Give them liberation. There is a great deal of suffering in the world. May they not be born again!' "

How seriously she looked on her spiritual ministry, especially her work of initiation, is evident from her words quoted above. She practically assumed the spiritual responsibility of the disciple whom she initiated. Besides, it is believed that she took upon herself the sins of the disciples and vicariously suffered for them. Every disciple was a 'son' or a 'daughter' to her.

She was not very particular to observe any formal rituals when she gave initiation, although she generally gave it after her daily worship of the Master to previously fixed candidates. But often she overlooked all these conventions and initiated disciples at any hour and under any condition. There are instances of her initiating a lady, who was her intimate friend in her girlhood, while both were resting on a bed after lunch: of initiating another during the time of mourning which is considered as one of defilement; of still others on a verandah, beneath the eaves of a house, on an open meadow, or even in a railway yard with an umbrella to serve as roof and the rain water from a pit as purificatory water. It would look that she sometimes gave initiation as the result of an instantaneous impulse, as when she imparted a Mantra occasionally while standing, or when some one held her feet weeping with a heart yearning for initiation. Further there have been cases of devotees who had never seen even a picture of hers before, but on seeing her afterwards had recognised her as the 'human goddess' whom they had seen in dream affording them protection in critical situations of life. Some received initiation from her in dream, and found the Mantra given them tallying exactly with what she gave afterwards in the waking state.

An initiation took her only a very short time a minute or two. This was so, not because she did it casually, but because her spiritual insight was so quick and unerring, resembling an inspiration. On this point she said once, "As soon as I want to impart a Mantra to some people, there arise in the mind such thoughts as, 'Give this' or 'Give that', whereas in other cases, it appears

as though I know nothing, and nothing seems to come up. I keep on sitting. Then after some cogitation I visualise the Mantra. In the case of good aspirants, the Mantra springs up instantaneously."

It is said that the Great Master left the Holy Mother on earth to demonstrate the Motherhood of God. If one prefers, one can understand it in a theological sense, but it will be evident that if universal love is the nature of God, then that trait is amply exhibited by the Holy Mother in her remarkable life on earth. Her spiritual ministry too exemplifies this. Just as a mother's affection for an offspring is never inhibited by any weakness he may have, so the Mother too accepted all devotees who went to her for protection, irrespective of their merits. All were alike in the infinitude of her love their comparative status in the moral and spiritual scales being obliterated in the very immensity of it.

Her Exit from the World

After her pilgrimages in 1911 and 1912, there are no major incidents to record in her life. She spent her days partly in Calcutta and partly at Jayrambati, engaging herself in active spiritual ministry. From the end of 1919 her health declined fast. She was getting an intermittent fever, the seriousness of which was not at first recognised. All local treatment was at first tried, but as it had little effect, she was brought to Calcutta in a very emaciated condition. It was diagnosed as Kala-Azaar (Black-water Fever) by doctors. There was no effective treatment for it in those days and she succumbed to it on 20th July 1920. Two remarkable happenings have to be recorded in connection with her last days. It has been mentioned that her attachment for Radhu was the main prop for her to sustain her physical life. Now it was noticed that a few days before her demise, she became entirely free from her strong bond of affection for Radhu. She, who could not till then remain in a place without Radhu by her side, now asked her not to come near her. On the other hand she wanted her to go to Jayrambati immediately. When Radhu's infant child went near her, she asked it to be carried away. When disciples and devotees pleaded with her on behalf of Radhu, she openly declared that she had completely taken her mind away from her. For Swami Saradananda and others, who knew the esoteric side of the Mother's personality, it was an indication that she was leaving her physical frame soon.

She was now fast sinking. Five days before her passing, an old devotee named 'Mother of Annapurna' was called into her room. When the lady expressed her fears about the future, the Mother remarked: "Why do you fear? You have seen the Master. But I tell you one thing-if you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger. The whole world is your own." Perhaps this embodies her last message to the world also.

During the last three days she practically spoke nothing beyond calling Swami Saradananda to her side and saying: "Sarat, I am going. Yogin, Golap and the rest are here. You look after them."

Just before passing away, her face and body became dark and shrivelled, but to the astonishment of all, a great change took place after life was extinct. Her shrivelled form was found to relax, and her face swelled up and assumed a radiant hue. Her countenance seemed to resemble the face of the image of the Goddess Durga used in worship-mellow and golden in colour, with the expression of calmness and serenity writ large on it. This expression lingered on her face for a long time.

The body was taken in procession to the Belur Math compound where it was cremated on the bank of the Ganga. A small beautiful temple now stands on the site. Another temple with a monastery attached stands at Jayrambati, the place of her birth, to commemorate her life and doings.

In her the world found a unique figure in its history, who combined in herself the roles of a perfect wife, nun, mother and teacher at the same time. In the endless procession of the members of the human species on this planet of ours, the Holy Mother stands out as a unique example, whose utter innocence could melt even the hardest of hearts, who never looked at the fault of others, whose love never made any distinction between the deserving and the undeserving, in whose eyes the saint and the sinner were alike her precious children, whose wide heart held all humanity in its maternal embrace, and who considered it a privilege to labour and to suffer for even the least of them. If we cannot see here the face of the all-loving Universal Mother, of God the Redeemer, where else can we? Only we should have the sensitiveness to recognise that the subtle potency of love transcends the obtrusive display of power.

Section I: First series
(Translated by Swami Nikhilananda)

Part 1: Recorded by Sarayubala Devi Udbodhan Office, Calcutta

January, 1911

ONE Friday morning Sriman K-came to our home at Pataldanga in Calcutta and said: "We shall go to Baghbazar to-morrow afternoon to pay our respects to the Holy Mother. Please be ready at that time." Well, after all, I shall now have the good fortune to prostrate myself at the feet of the Holy Mother! Such was my exuberance of joy that I could hardly sleep during the night. I had been living in Calcutta for the last fourteen or fifteen years. And after such a length of time the Mother was gracious enough to afford me this opportunity to pay my respects to her.

Next day in the afternoon we hired a carriage, fetched Sumati from the Brahmo Girls School, and set out to the Holy Mother's house at Baghbazar. I can hardly describe the eagerness and fervour which I felt at the time .of this pilgrimage. I reached her house at Baghbazar and found her standing at the door of the shrine room. She was standing with one foot at the door-sill and the other on the door-mat. There was no veil on her head. Her left arm was raised high and placed on the door, while the right one was hanging by the side. The upper part of her body was bare. She had been looking wistfully as if expecting somebody. As soon as I prostrated myself at her feet, she asked Sumati about me. Sumati introduced me as her elder sister. She had been visiting the Holy Mother for some time past. Then the Mother looked at me and said, "Look here, my child, how much I am troubled by these people here! My sister-in-law and her daughter, Radhu, are all down with fever. I do not know who will look after them and nurse them. Will you wait for a minute? Let me wash my cloth and come back." We waited and she returned after a few minutes. Then she offered us two handfuls of some sweets and asked me to share those with my sister. Sumati had to go back to her school. Therefore we could not stay for a longer time. We saluted her and took leave of her. The Mother said, "Come again." This interview of five minutes could not satiate the inordinate hankering of my soul. I returned home all the more thirsty.

12th February, 1911

When I went to the Udbodhan Office on this day, I found that the Holy Mother had gone to the house of Balaram Bose. I had not to wait long before she returned. As soon as I saluted her she asked me with a smile "Who has accompanied you to-day?" "One of my nephews," I replied.

Mother: How are you today? How is your sister? You did not come for a long time. 1 was anxious about you and thought you might not be doing well.

I was surprised because I had met her once only and that just for five minutes. But she had not forgotten us. My eyes were filled with tears of joy.

The Mother said with great tenderness, "You have come here, and I was feeling restive at the house of Balaram."

I was completely taken aback. My sister Sumati had sent two woollen caps through me for 'Khude', the baby nephew of the Holy Mother. I handed them over to her. She expressed much joy at these trifles. She sat on the bed and said, "Sit by me here." I sat by her side. The Mother said with great tenderness, "It seems, my child, as if I have met you many a time before, as if we know each other for a long time." “I do not know," said I, "I was here one day only for five minutes."

The Mother laughed and began to speak highly of the devotion and sincerity of mine and my sister's. But I do not know how far I deserve those compliments. Gradually many women devotees assembled. All of them looked wistfully and with great love at the smiling and compassionate face of the Mother. I had never seen such a sight before. My mind was feasting upon the spiritual joy, when someone reminded me that the carriage was ready for my return. The Mother at once left her seat and offered me some Prasada. She held these before me and said, "Eat these!" I felt shy of eating in the presence of others without sharing. The Mother said, "Why do you hesitate? Take these sweets." I accepted the offerings in my hand. I bowed down before her and took my leave. She said "Come again. Can you go down the steps alone, or shall I go with you '?" She came with me as far as the staircase. I said, “I can go alone. You need not take trouble." The Mother

said in parting, "Come another day in the morning." I returned with a sense of fulfilment and thought, "What a wonderful love!"

14th May, 1911

No sooner had I prostrated myself before the Holy Mother today than she said, "It is fine that you have come. I was thinking all the time about you. Why did you not come all these days?"

Devotee: I was not in Calcutta. I was at my father's house.

Mother: What is the matter with Sumati? She has not come here for a long time. Is she very busy with her studies?

Devotee: Her husband was not here.

Mother: Well, she goes to school. Do they follow the duties of the world?

Devotee: We do not know, Mother, what the world is and what our duty is. You alone know that.

The Mother smiled. "What a warm day!" she said, and gave me a fan. "Ah dear, you took a hurried meal and ran up here. Now lie down by my side."

A mat was spread on the floor. I hesitated to lie on her bed. But she said, "Why do you hesitate? Lie down! Listen to my words!" I could not help lying down. The Mother became drowsy and I lay silent. A few women devotees and two nuns arrived. One of the nuns was middle-aged while the other was young: The Mother said, with her eyes closed, "Who is there? Is it Gaurdasi?" The young nun said, "How did you know it, Mother?" The Mother said that she felt so. After a few moments she sat up. The young nun then said: "We had been to the Belur Math. Swami Premananda fed us sumptuously. When he is there, one cannot return from the Math without being fed thus." The Mother gently reprimanded some one of the party for not having put the vermilion mark on her forehead, such a mark being obligatory on every married woman if her husband is alive.

Gauri-Ma learnt about me from the Holy Mother and invited me to her girls' school. About sixty girls were attending the school. She asked me if I knew

how to sew. I said that I could sew a little, and she requested me to teach that much to the students of the Ashrama.

With the permission of the Holy Mother, I visited the school of Gauri-Ma one day. Gauri-Ma was very loving to me, and requested me to go there every day for an hour or two and give the girls some lessons. I said, "It is absurd for me to be a teacher with my little training. If you insist, I can just teach them the simple alphabet." But Gauri-Ma was inexorable. I had to yield.

One day, after leaving the school of Gauri-Ma, I went to see the Holy Mother. It was then summer and I was quite tired. The Mother was seated in her room, surrounded by a group of women devotees. As soon as I prostrated myself before her, she looked at me and at once took a small fan from the top of the mosquito-curtain. She began to fan me so that I might be refreshed. Then she said anxiously, "Take off your blouse quickly so that the body may be cool" What an unprecedented love! She began to caress me before many devotees. I felt ashamed. All eyes were fixed upon me. Seeing her eagerness, I had to take off the blouse. The more I requested her to hand over the fan to me, the more she insisted with great tenderness, "That is all right! Be a little refreshed!" She brought a tumbler of water and some sweets. Watching me partake of them, she became happy. The carriage from the school had been waiting for me. So I had to take leave soon.

3rd August, 1911

This morning I went early to Baghbazar. I longed to be initiated by the Holy Mother to-day; so I took a few articles with me for the purpose. Gauri-Ma gave me the list of articles and she also accompanied me to the Holy Mother's place. When I arrived there, I found her absorbed in worship. She asked me by signs to take a seat. After the worship was over, Gauri-Ma broached the subject of my initiation. I had also spoken about it to her one day. I had taken some good bananas with me. She was very pleased to see the fruits and said, "Ah, I see you have brought many bananas." One of the monks present expressed his desire for them. Then she added, "Take that carpet and sit on my left." I replied. "I have not yet finished my bath in the Ganges."

Mother: That does not matter. It is enough if you have changed your clothes.

I sat by her side. I felt my heart palpitating. The Mother asked the others to leave the room and then said to me, “Now tell me what Mantra was revealed to you in dream."

Devotee: Shall I utter those words or write them down?

Mother: You may tell them to me ...

At the time of initiation the Holy Mother explained to me the meaning of the Mantra that I had received in dream, She at first asked me to repeat that Mantra and then communicated to me a new Mantra, I was instructed to repeat the first Mantra a few times every day, and then repeat the second and meditate.

I saw the Mother absorbed in meditation for a few minutes before she explained the meaning of the Mantra to me. At the time of initiation my whole body began to tremble. I began to weep, for which I could not divine any cause. The Mother put a big mark of red sandalpaste on my forehead. I gave her a few rupees for offering at the shrine. She handed over the money to Golap-M.

I noticed the Mother to be severely grave at the time of initiation. Then she left the seat of worship. She asked me to repeat the Mantra for some time and meditate and pray, I did as I was asked to do. As I bowed at her feet, she blessed me with the words, "May you attain devotion to God!" Even now I remember those words and pray to her, "Please remember your blessing. May I not be deprived of its effect!"

The Holy Mother was going to the Ganges for her bath. Golap-Ma accompanied her. I also joined the party, taking with me the towel and the cloth of the Mother. It was drizzling. After finishing her bath, the Mother gave the priest on the ghat a coin and a mango. As she made these offerings, she said, "I am giving you the fruit, but it is the fruit of the gift that belongs to you." Ah! The priest could hardly realize who made this gift! He could hardly understand the significance of those words! Nor can we, puny creatures, torn as we are by millions of petty selfish desires!

The Holy Mother changed her dress and gave me the wet cloth to carry. Golap-Ma headed the party while I walked behind. The Mother was between us. She carried some water of the Ganges in a small vessel and offered a

little of it at every sacred banyan tree that stood along the way. There was a water-jar near the cistern close to the tap on the ground floor. The Mother washed her feet with that water and said to me, "There is mud on your feet. Wash it off." As I was looking for some water, she said, "There is water in the jar. Why do you not wash your feet with that?" "You have touched that water. How can I use it?" said I with some reluctance. "Sprinkle a little over your head," replied the Mother. But I hesitated and said, "I cannot use that water." I took some water from the cistern in another jar and washed my hands and feet. She waited for me all the time. Then we went upstairs. She took some offered sweets and fruits in two leaf-plates, and asked me to sit by her. With great tenderness she fed me with the Prasada and also partook of it herself.

Gradually many women devotees arrived. I did not know them. They would take their meal at noontime at the Mother's place. After the worship was over, we all sat for lunch. The Mother also occupied her seat. She took three morsels of food and then gave me some Prasada, which was also distributed among all others. The Mother now became her former self. She became jolly again. Since the time of initiation she had been altogether in a different mood, grave and introspective-a veritable goddess ready to grant favour and punish iniquity. I had been trembling with awe. I have seen her, later on, giving initiation to many devotees, but I have never again seen her in such a grave mood. Laughing and joking, she initiated many persons. They were also happy and satisfied. Goaded by curiosity, I sometimes asked the devotees how they found her at the time of initiation. One middle-aged widow once said in reply, "Just as we see her always. Nothing very particular. I had been initiated before by my family Guru. Afterwards I heard of the Mother and came to her for initiation. She at first asked me to repeat ten times the Mantra I had received from my family preceptor. Then she gave me initiation. She pointed out Sri Ramakrishna as my Guru and another deity as my Ishta. She instructed me to pray thus to Sri Ramakrishna: '0 Lord, please relieve me of all sins committed in this and in previous lives', and so on.' I am greatly troubled now-a-days. Can you explain it? I cannot repeat the Mantra for more than half an hour. Someone, as it were, pushes me out of the seat. Do you also feel like that? I often think of asking the Holy Mother about it. But I cannot do so. You are so free with her. Has the Mother deceived me then?" I never wanted to know all these details. But as the lady spoke out all this very frankly, I said, "Please open your heart to the Mother. At first you may feel a little constraint. But it will be easy by and

by. We also could not be so free with her at first. Even now she, at times, becomes so serious that we cannot approach her."

In the evening the women devotees took their leave of the Mother one by one. She asked her nieces to meditate and pray. They were late, and she said in a tone of displeasure, "It is evening. Instead of meditating, they are gossiping!" Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma and other devotees prostrated themselves at her feet. She blessed them all, laying her hand on their heads, or touching the chins, or kissing them. She bowed before the image of Sri Ramakrishna and then took her seat for meditation. After she finished her meditation, I took leave of her and returned home.

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I was not able to visit the Holy Mother for some days on account of the pressure of my school duties. No sooner had I saluted her today than she began to show her love for me in countless ways. Bhudev was reading the Mahabharata. He was a mere boy, and therefore could not read fluently. The Mother had her other duties also to attend to. It was almost evening. She said to Bhudev, pointing to me, "Give her the book. She will read it quite easily. The reading cannot be stopped without finishing this chapter." It was her order; so I began to read the Mahabharata. Never before had I read a book in her presence. At first I felt a sort of shyness, but somehow I finished the chapter. The Mother saluted the book with folded hands. We went to the shrine to witness the evening worship. The Mother took her wonted seat and soon became absorbed in meditation.

The Mother completed her Japa, uttering the name of God in a loud voice, and bowed down before the image of Sri Ramakrishna. The Prasada was then distributed to all. After this the conversation drifted to our daily duties. The Mother, referring to her own busy days at Jayrambati, said: "Always be engaged in some work or other. It is conducive to the health of both the body and the mind. In my early days at Jayrambati I was always busy with some work or other and would never visit my neighbours; for, people would blurt out at the very sight of me 'Dear me, Syama's daughter has been married to a lunatic!' I avoided meeting anybody in order to escape such criticism."

Just in the open square in front of the Holy Mother's house, there lived some people belonging to some parts of India outside Bengal. They earned their livelihood by hard manual labour. One of them had a 'mistress. They lived

together. Once the mistress was seriously ill. Referring to her illness the Holy Mother said, "He nursed her with such great devotion! I have never before seen anything like it. He has shown a real spirit of service." She began to speak highly of the devotion of this man.

The idea of a mistress would certainly have made us turn up our noses in disgust. Ah, how often we fail to recognize goodness when veiled in an evil garb!

A poor up-country woman from the house across the street, came to the Holy Mother, carrying a sick child in her arms. She solicited her blessings. The Mother was gracious to that child. She said that the child would soon recover, and blessed it. Two big pomegranates and some grapes had been offered in the shrine. She handed over all these fruits to the poor woman, saying, "Give these to your sick child." The woman was overjoyed at this generosity of the Mother and repeatedly bowed down before her.

11th February, 1912

The moment I met the Holy Mother today and sat down after saluting her, she began to say with great sorrow, "Alas! Girish Babu is dead. Today is the fourth day. His relatives came here to invite me to go to their house. Is it possible for me to go there any more? What devotion for, and faith in, Sri Ramakrishna Girish had! Have you heard this incident? He begged Sri Ramakrishna to be born as his son. Sri Ramakrishna said in reply, 'Why should I care to be born as your son!' But who knows, my child, the inscrutable ways of the Lord! A son was born to Girish some time after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna. A strange boy, indeed! Even when he was four years old, he would not exchange a word with anybody. People could know his mind only from his gestures. His parents looked upon him as Sri Ramakrishna himself. They kept apart everything belonging to him—his dress, plate, cup, glass, etc. Nobody else would use those things....

"One day the boy became extremely restive to see me. My picture was in the upper floor of the house. He dragged the whole household there, and uttering a cry, pointed out the picture to them. At first they did not understand him. Then they brought him to me. Though he was but a little child of four, he prostrated himself before me. Then he went to the first floor and began to pull his father by his cloth. He wanted that his father also should see me. Girish wept bitterly and said, 'I cannot, my darling, see the Holy Mother. I

am a great sinner!' But the boy was inexorable. So Girish had to yield. He took the boy in his arm. With his whole body trembling and tears trickling down his cheeks, he came up and prostrated on the ground before me. He said, 'Mother, this boy has made me see your holy feet!' But the boy passed away when he was four years old.

"Once Girish and his wife were taking the air on the roof of their house. I had been staying then at the house of Balaram. The houses were near each other. I also went to the roof that day. I did not notice that Girish could see me from the roof of his house. His wife said to him, 'Look there, the Holy Mother is pacing on the roof of the house.' Girish at once turned his back on me and said to his wife, 'No, no, I cannot thus stealthily look at the Holy Mother. My eyes are vicious!' He at once came down from the roof. I heard this from his wife."

Part 2: Recorded by Sarayubala Devi, Udbodhan Office, Calcutta.
15th June, 1912

The Holy Mother was seated with a number of women devotees. I was acquainted with some of them. The Mother was very cheerful in their company. She welcomed me with a smile. I requested Gauri-Ma to bring from the library two books, the life of Sister Nivedita and the Indian lectures of Swami Vivekananda. I wished to read something from the life of Sister Nivedita. The Mother agreed and said, "Please read Nivedita's life. I also received a copy of the book the other day. But I have not yet looked into it." I felt a little shy to read the book in the presence of so many people. At the same time I was eager to read to the Mother the beautiful biography of the Sister written by Saralabala. So I obeyed her order. The Mother as well as the other devotees began to listen with rapt attention. Their eyes became moist on hearing of the wonderful devotion of Nivedita. Tears trickled down the cheeks of the Mother.

Referring to Nivedita, she said, "What sincere devotion Nivedita had! She never considered anything too much that she might do for me. She would often come to see me at night. Once seeing that light struck my eyes, she put a shade of paper around the lamp. She would prostrate herself before me and, with great tenderness, take the dust of my feet with her handkerchief. I felt that she even hesitated to touch my feet." The thought of Nivedita opened the floodgate of her mind and she suddenly became grave.

Those present began to give their reminiscences of Sister Nivedita. Durga-Didi said, "It is the misfortune of India that she passed away at such an early age." Another lady said, "She looked upon India as her motherland. She herself said so, many a time. On the day of the Saraswati Puja she would walk bare-footed, putting on her forehead the mark of the sacred ash of the sacrificial fire." I finished reading. The Mother now and then expressed her feelings towards the Sister. She said at last, "The inner soul feels for a sincere devotee."

It was the hour for afternoon worship. The Mother changed her clothes and sat on the carpet before the image of Sri Ramakrishna. She had made some flower garlands with her own hands to decorate the image. Rash Behari, a

young Brahmacharin, had kept near the garland some sweets for offering. Ants gathered around the sweets. Some ants were seen also in the garlands. Mother said, with a laugh, "See what Rash Behari has done! Sri Ramakrishna will be bitten by these ants." She removed the ants and tenderly decorated the image with the garlands. Seeing her thus decorate the picture of her husband with flowers before others, Surabala, her sister-in-law, laughed. Later the Prasada was distributed to all.

One lady devotee said, "Mother, I have five daughters. I cannot find suitable bridegrooms for them. I am so anxious about it."

Mother: Why do you worry about their marriage? If you cannot find suitable husbands for them, please send them to the Sister Nivedita Girls' School. They will be trained there. They will be very happy in the school.

Another lady devotee: If you have faith in the Holy Mother, then do as she asks you to do. That will be for your good. If you listen to her, you will have no worry.

Needless to say, the mother of the five girls could hardly appreciate the advice.

Third devotee: It is very difficult to find suitable bridegrooms now-a-days. Many boys refuse to marry.

Mother: Yes, the boys have learnt how to discriminate. They are gradually realizing that the happiness of the world is transitory. The less you become attached to the world, the more you enjoy peace of mind.

It was quite late before I took leave of her that night.

* * * *

Another day I went to. Baghbazar and found the Holy Mother resting after her lunch. She was gracious enough to request me to fan her. Suddenly I heard her speaking to herself: "Well, you all have come here. But where is Sri Ramakrishna?" I said in reply, "We could not meet him in this life. Who knows in which future birth we shall be able to see him? But this is our greatest good fortune that we have been able to touch your feet." "That is

true, indeed." was the brief remark of the Holy Mother. I was rather amazed at this confession. Very seldom would she speak of herself in such a way.

I could hardly realize at that time that people might possibly have their secrets to confide to the Holy Mother. I was a foolish girl, so I could not comprehend that. Therefore if I happened to miss her on entering her room, I would search the house for her; I could hardly wait for her to come. One evening two pretty young ladies had been taking the Holy Mother into their confidence in the northern porch of her room when I suddenly presented myself there, not finding her anywhere else. I heard the Mother saying to them, "Lay the burden of your mind before Sri Ramakrishna. Tell him your sorrows with your tears. You will find that he will fill up your arms with the desired object." I could at once understand that the ladies were praying to be blessed with children. They were abashed at the sight of me. My state of mind was even worse. But I was taught a great lesson that day. I took a vow that I would never again go to the presence of the Holy Mother without previously intimating my arrival. A few months later I again met those ladies in the house of the Holy Mother. I was glad to find that their cherished desire was going to be fulfilled soon.

Gauri-Ma was present there. In reply to our request, she gave us some of her reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna. She said, "I had visited Sri Ramakrishna long before many devotees began to go to him. I saw Naren and Kali while they were quite young." It was evening. The conversation had to be cut short. Gauri-Ma took leave of the Holy Mother. I also had to go. As I was about to take leave of her, she called me to the porch and gave me some Prasada. She said, "Come again. You do not stay here long at a time. Come one morning at seven o‘clock and have your noonday meal with us."

18th September, 1912

I was a little busy with some work in Gauri-Ma's Girls' School. Therefore I was not free to go to the Holy Mother according to my desire. It was an auspicious day when, one morning, I arrived at her place. She was getting ready to go to the Ganges for her bath. At the very sight of me she said with evident pleasure, "I am very glad you have come today. It is an auspicious day, being the birthday of Radhika. Wait here till I return from the Ganges." I expressed my desire to accompany her and she first agreed. It was drizzling and Golap-Ma sternly objected to my going, as I would be exposed to the rain. The Mother supported Golap-Ma and said, "Please wait here. I shall

return presently." We often noticed her behaving like a gentle young girl. She would never press her views over those of others. As soon as she came to the street, the rain stopped. She returned home after finishing the bath and said, "Well the rain stopped as soon as I came out into the street. You also wanted to accompany me. I thought it would have been nice if you had come with me. You could have had a sight of the Holy Ganges." To tell the truth, I was not so eager for the Ganges as for her holy company. For, as we are involved in a thousand and one duties of the world, we can hardly find time to visit her. On those few days when we can fortunately go to her, we do not like to leave her presence even for a minute. Golap-Ma, however, heard the words of the Holy Mother and remarked, "What does it matter if she has not seen the Ganges! All desires will be fulfilled by touching your holy feet." I also nodded assent to these words. But the Mother said at once, "Do not say so! Ah, it is the Mother Ganges after all'" The Mother would seldom reveal her divine greatness through any word or deed. She would always act in such a way that people might take her to be an ordinary human being like themselves. Only on rare occasions would she, out of grace for some fortunate devotee, reveal her divine aspect. She entered the room, sat on the bed and said, "Look here. I have finished my bath in the Ganges!" I understood that she had come to know of my innermost desire of worshipping her lotus feet. I said to myself, "Thou art ever pure. It is not necessary for Thee to bathe in the Ganges to purify Thyself." When I sat at her feet with flowers and sandalpaste, she said, "Don't put any Tulasi leaves." I worshipped her feet with flowers and sandal paste. I bowed down to her. Afterwards she began to take her breakfast. She made me sit near and began to give me, with infinite love, half of every article of food she took. I ate the Prasada with great joy. As I was eating from the leaf plate, I was reminded of Saint Durga Charan Nag. I said to the Mother, "This leaf-plate often reminds me of Nag Mahasaya."

Mother: What wonderful devotion he had! Look at this dry leaf-plate. Who can eat it? But he had an exuberance of devotion, and would swallow the leaf which had touched the Prasada. Ah! What loving eyes he had! Slightly reddish and always moist with tears! His body was emaciated by hard austerities. He would come to see me. He could hardly climb the steps. His emotions would well up at the very sight of me. He would tremble like a leaf. He would stagger while walking. I have never seen such devotion in anybody.

Devotee: I have read in his biography that he gave up his medical practice and was absorbed, day and night, in his meditation on Sri Ramakrishna. One day his father said in an angry mood, "You are so indifferent to the world. What will be your fate? You will not have a piece of cloth to cover your body with! And you will have to eat frogs to satisfy your hunger!" There was a dead frog in the courtyard. Nag Mahasaya threw away the cloth that he had been wearing and ate the frog. Then he said to his father, "I have fulfilled your two prophecies. Please banish all your anxieties regarding my food and clothing and devote yourself to the thought of God."

Mother: What a wonderful devotion to his father! He did not make any difference between purity and impurity. This speaks of his high spiritual realization.

Devotee: Once, on a very auspicious day, he came home from Calcutta. The father reprimanded him and said, "You were in Calcutta near the Ganges. How foolish of you to have come home away from the Ganges on such an auspicious day! You should have stayed in Calcutta and taken bath in the holy river." But just at the auspicious moment of that day, all noticed water rising in a spout from the courtyard. Every place was flooded. Nag Mahasaya became mad with ecstasy and cried, "Come, Mother Ganges!" He sprinkled that water on his head. The people of his locality bathed in that water and felt as if they had bathed in the Ganges.

Mother: True, even the impossible becomes possible through devotion. Once I gave him a piece of cloth. He always tied it around his head. His wife also is very good and devoted. She came to see me the other day during the summer season she is still alive.

At this time some devotees arrived and the conversation was stopped. They prostrated themselves before the Holy Mother. She asked me to prepare some rolls of betel leaves. I prepared two and handed them over to her. She ate one herself and returned the other to me. I left her again to prepare the rest of the betel leaves. The Mother, after a while, came to our room with two devotees. They started to help me and the work was over very quickly. The Mother separated a few leaves to make a present to them. She was very happy and said, "Ah! My good girls have finished their job so quickly"

The Holy Mother retired to the room of Golap-Ma on the second floor. I went there a few minutes later and saw that she was lying on the floor, resting her head on the door sill. So I could not step over the door-sill and enter the room. She looked at me and said, "Come in. It is all right!" She was always so free and informal. She raised her head from the sill and I entered the room. I sat by her side and began to fan her. She asked me various things regarding the school of Gauri-Ma. I gave her suitable replies. Just then the two women devotees came there. One of them began to dress the Mother's hair. She separated one or two grey hairs and tied them in the skirt of her cloth. She said, "I shall preserve them as a souvenir." The Holy Mother felt abashed and said with hesitation, "Why are you doing so? I have thrown away so much hair before." She went to the roof to bask in the sun. We also followed her. There were many clothes drying in the sun. She asked me to take them away to the room.

Later, when the worship was over, the Holy Mother asked me to make the necessary preparation for the noonday meal of the devotees. We all sat together for the meal. The Mother took a morsel or two. The Prasada was then distributed among us. The two women-devotees mentioned above were with us. One of them was old and had her husband. She had seen Sri Ramakrishna. The other one was her daughter-in-law.

The old lady said, "Sri Ramakrishna gave us many instructions. But we have carried out very few of them. Had we followed his advice, we would not have suffered so much in the world. We are attached to the world and are always running after this or that work."

The Mother said, replying, "One must do some work. Through work alone can one remove the bondage of work, not by avoiding work. Total detachment comes later on. One should not be without work even for a moment."

After the meal the Mother was resting for a while. She lay down on the bed. All the devotees were eager to do her some personal service. But she asked them all to take some rest. They all therefore went away to their respective places as they had various things to attend to. I remained there with an old widow who was a contemporary of Sri Ramakrishna. I was massaging the Mother's body. The widow sat by her side and began to narrate the various incidents of her family life. "Mother!" said she, "you always excuse my shortcomings but my people are so exacting." I asked her if she had seen Sri

Ramakrishna. "Yes, dear," she replied. "I have seen him. He often visited our place. The Holy Mother was quite young at that time."

Devotee:' Please tell us something about Sri Ramakrishna.

Widow: Not I ask Mother to tell us something about him.

The Mother was resting with her eyes closed, so I did not ask her. After a while, the Mother herself said, "He who will pray to God eagerly will see Him. The other day one of our devotees, Tej Chandra, passed away. What a sincere soul he was! Sri Ramakrishna used to frequent his house. Some one had deposited Rs. 200 with Tej Chandra. One day he was robbed of that amount by a pick-pocket in the tram car. He discovered the loss after some time and suffered a terrible mental agony. He came to the bank of the Ganges and prayed to Sri Ramakrishna, with tears in his eyes, '0 Lord, what have you done with me!' He was not rich enough to make up that amount from his own pocket. As he was thus weeping, he saw Sri Ramakrishna appear before him and say, "Why do you weep so bitterly? The money is there under a brick on the bank of the Ganges." He quickly removed the brick and really found there a bundle of banknotes. He narrated the incident to Sarat (Swami Saradananda). Sarat said, 'You are lucky to get the vision of Sri Ramakrishna even now. But we do not see him.'

Why should Sarat and others like him see him any more? They have had enough of him and all their desires have been fulfilled. Those who have not seen him with their physical eyes are most anxious for his vision. When Sri Ramakrishna was staying at Dakshineswar, Rakhal and other devotees were very young. One day Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) came to Sri Ramakrishna and said that he was very hungry. Sri Ramakrishna came to the Ganges and cried out, 'O Gaurdasi, come here! My Rakhal is hungry.' At that time there was no refreshment stall at Dakshineswar. A little later a boat was seen coming up the Ganges. It anchored near the temple. Balaram Babu, Gaurdasi and some other devotees came out of the boat with some sweets. Sri Ramakrishna was very happy, and shouted for Rakhal. He said, 'Come here. Here are sweets. You said that you were hungry.' Rakhal became angry and remarked, 'Why are you broadcasting my hunger?' Sri Ramakrishna said, 'What is the harm? You are hungry. You want something to eat. What is wrong in speaking about it?' Sri Ramakrishna had a childlike nature."

Bhudev, the nephew of the Holy Mother, just then returned from school. He was having fever. The Mother asked me to arrange a bed for him. She was preparing to go to Balaram Babu's house to see his son who was suffering from an attack of dysentery. She finished the evening worship and offered me some Prasada. I said that I would eat it later on. She agreed and asked Nalini, her niece, to give me the Prasada later. A carriage was brought for her. She asked me to wait there till her return. Golap-Ma accompanied her. They returned after an hour. The Holy Mother was glad to see me and said, "I have come back quickly for you. Have you eaten the Prasada?" When I replied in the negative, she remarked, "Nalini, why did you not give her the Prasada as I had asked you?"

Nalini: I forgot to do so. I shall bring it presently.

Mother: You need not worry about it any more. I shall give her that Prasada myself. (To me) Why did you not ask for it yourself? This is your own home.

Devotee: I was not very hungry. Had I been so, I would have asked for it. The Mother, shortly after, brought some sweets that had been offered in the shrine and gave them to me. I partook of them joyously. I prostrated myself before her and asked her leave. She said, "Come again, dear child. Durga! Durga! Shall I come with you to the ground floor? Can you go alone? It is night." I said, "I shall be able to go alone, Mother." Still she began to repeat the name of God and accompanied me as far as the staircase. "You need not take any more trouble," I said, "It will be easy for me to find the way."

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It was the Akshaya Tritiya--a very auspicious day with the Hindus. I came to see the Holy Mother. The old lady with her daughter-in-law, mentioned before, was also there. She was about to give the Mother, as is the practice on such holy occasions, some fruits and a piece of sacred thread. The Mother interrupted her and said, "Why do you give these to me? Give them to Bhudev." Then in the course of her conversation she looked at us and said, "I bless you on this holy day that you may attain to liberation in this life. Birth and death are extremely painful. May you not suffer from them any more!"

* * * *

It was the day of the sacred Car Festival. At seven o'clock in the morning I went to Gauri-Ma's Ashrama. She had invited me there for lunch. I had a desire to go to the Holy Mother from the school as soon as possible. We finished our meal at, two o'clock. When Gauri-Ma and I came to the place of the Holy Mother, it was four o'clock. The Mother had been performing the evening service in the shrine room. We prostrated ourselves before her. Gauri-Ma took her aside and whispered something in her ears. I was asked to join them later on. I had taken with me a piece of silk cloth for her. I placed it near her feet and said, "Mother, will you kindly use it?" "O yes, darling," she said with a laugh. Just then some men devotees came to bow down before her. We retired to the porch. One devotee brought with him some hibiscus flowers and roses, a garland of jasmine, fruits and sweets. He placed these offerings near her feet and began to worship her. What a soul-enthralling sight! The Mother was seated quietly with a sweet smile playing on her lips. The garland was hanging round her neck. The flowers adorned her feet. After the worship was over, the devotee took a little from every fruit and sweetmeat and prayed to her to eat it. Gauri-Ma said with a laugh, "You are in the grip of a staunch devotee. You must eat a little of everything." The Mother also was laughing and said, "Not so much. I cannot eat so much!" She ate a little from every article of the offering. The devotee took the Prasada in his hand and touched his forehead with it. He beamed with an indescribable joy. He prostrated himself before the Mother and then came away. The Mother took off the garland from her neck and gave it to Gauri-Ma. The offered flowers were distributed among the devotees.

As I have already stated, it was the sacred day of the Car Festival. Bhudev improvised a car for the occasion. Arrangements were made for taking the image of Sri Ramakrishna in this car. Gauri-Ma had an important engagement in the school, so she had to leave us. The conversation drifted to Gauri-Ma. The Mother said, "She devotes her energy to bring up the girls in the school. She nurses them when they are ill. She has no family of her own. Her motherly instinct has been finding expression through these girls. This is her last birth; therefore she has been passing through all these experiences."

The image of Sri Ramakrishna was taken in the car. The Mother from her bed looked at the image intently. She was very happy. The car with the image was taken down. The procession went along the streets and along the bank of the Ganges. The party returned after dusk. The women-devotees pulled the car in the porch of the upper floor. The Mother, her two nieces

and I joined them. When the car was going along the street, the Mother remarked, "All cannot go to Puri to see the Car Festival Those who have seen Sri Ramakrishna in this car will realize God."

Part 3: Recorded by Sarayubala Devi, Udbodhan Office, Calcutta.
October, 1912

One morning, during the Durga Puja holidays, I went to visit the Holy Mother. I found her very busy. I sat near her. She sent for a devotee who had come from Ranchi. He had brought with him many flowers, fruits, a piece of cloth and a garland of linen flowers. He requested the Mother to wear the garland on her neck. As she did so, Golap-Ma took him to task, for the iron wire of the garland might hurt her. The Mother said tenderly, "No, I have put on the garland over my cloth." I had taken with me some fruits and sweets. The Mother asked me to offer them to the Lord. She ate a grape and said that it was very sweet.

The Mother had on her person the cloth which I had given her a few days ago. Pointing that to me, she remarked, "See, I have used it and now it is dirty:' I was amazed to see this and thought what infinite tenderness the Mother had for even such an unfit devotee as myself.

Nalini, the Mother's niece, was in an angry mood. The Mother reprimanded her and said, "Women should not get angry so easily. They must practise forbearance. In infancy and childhood their parents are their only protection and in youth their husbands. Women are generally very sensitive. A mere word upsets them. And words also are so cheap now-a-days. They should have patience and try to put up with parents or husbands in spite of difficulties."

Radhu sat near us with her cloth, pulled above her knees. The Mother reproved her and said, "Dear me! Why should a woman pull her cloth above her knees?" She cited a verse which says, "It is as good as being naked when the cloth is pulled above the knees."

Chandra Babu's sister came to see us. She asked me in the course of a conversation, "Is the husband of the Holy Mother still alive? Are these his children and daughters-in-law?" "Goodness gracious!" said I, "Have you not read the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna? He always exhorted people to renounce lust and gold." The lady was nonplussed and said, "Excuse me; I took them for her own children."

It was the time of the Durga Puja. The Mother had a bundle of new clothes before her. She separated the clothes intended for the husbands of her three nieces. She took a cloth in her hand and said, "G. will put on this new cloth at the time of the Puja and go to the Belur Math."

After the noon day worship, we had our meal. The Mother was resting. I sat by her side and began to fan her. She said with great tenderness, "There is a pillow there. Bring it and lie down near me. I do not require any more fanning." I hesitated to use her pillow and brought one from Radhu's room. The Mother said with a smile, "This pillow belongs to Radhu's mother, that crazy woman. She will make a fuss. Please use my pillow. There is no harm in it." Then she said to Radhu, "Please come here and lie by your sister." The conversation drifted to the remarks of Chandra Babu's sister, narrated above. The Mother said, "Well, you could have easily replied that her husband is there in the shrine room, and that all of you are his children." I said, "All the men and women of the world are his children!" The Mother laughed and remarked, "People come here with various selfish desires. Someone comes with a cucumber, offers it to Sri Ramakrishna, and prays for the fulfilment of selfish desires. This is the nature of average people."

After a little rest we got up. A few women devotees were in the adjacent room. Two of them wore ochre robes. They prostrated themselves before the Mother. They brought some sweets for offering. We came to know they were the disciples of Siva-Narayan Paramahamsa of Kalighat. Their teacher was just then engaged in performing a grand sacrifice.

One of the nuns asked, "Is there any truth in image worship? Our teacher does not approve of it. He instructs people in the worship of the fire and the sun."

Mother: You should not doubt the words of your own teacher. Why do you ask me about it, when you have heard the opinion of your Guru in the matter?

The nun: We want to know your opinion.

The Mother refused to give any opinion. But the nun was stubborn and began to press for a reply. The Mother said at last, "If your teacher were an illumined soul—you have forced me to say—then he would not have made

such a statement. From time immemorial innumerable people have worshipped images and thereby attained spiritual knowledge. Do you want to deny this fact? Sri Ramakrishna never cherished any such parochial and one-sided view. Brahman exists everywhere. The prophets and incarnations are born to show the way to a benighted humanity. They give different instructions suited to different temperaments. There are many ways to realize the Truth. Therefore all these instructions have their relative value. Take, for instance, a tree. There are birds perched on its branches. They have different colours, white, black, yellow, red, etc. Their sounds are also different. But we say that these are the sounds of the birds. We never designate a particular sound as that of birds and refuse to acknowledge other sounds as such."

The nuns desisted from argument after some time. They then inquired about the Calcutta address of the Holy Mother and said that they would like to see her again. After they had left, the Mother said, "It does not become a woman to argue like that. Even the wise could hardly realize the nature of Brahman by argument. Is Brahman an object of discussion?"

A few days after, the Mother was to leave for Banaras, and I might not meet her for some time. She was extremely kind to me when I took leave of her, and I was so overpowered by her love that I did not exchange a word with anyone that night.

31st January, 1913

The Holy Mother had returned from Banaras on 17 January. I went to her place one morning and found her absorbed in worship. After the worship was over, she left the seat and said, "I am glad to see you, my child. I was thinking of you and feared lest I should miss you again. We shall soon be leaving for our country home."

It was late in the morning. Radhu, her niece, was ready to go to the Christian missionary school of the neighbourhood. Golap-Ma came and said to the Mother, 'Radhu is now a grown-up girl. Why should she go to school any more?" She asked Radhu not to go to school. Radhu began to cry. The Mother said, "She is not quite grown-up. Let her go to school. She can do immense good to others if she gets education and learns some useful arts at the school. She has been married in a backward village. Through education

she will not only improve herself but will be able to help others." So Radhu was allowed to go to school.

Annapurna's mother brought a girl with her to be initiated by the Holy Mother. She said, "Mother, this girl is pestering me to be taken to be initiated by you. I could not avoid her. Therefore I have brought her to you."

Mother: How will it be possible to give initiation to-day? I have already taken my breakfast.

A.'s mother: But the girl is fasting. It does not matter at all if you have eaten anything or not.

Mother: Is she ready for initiation?

A's mother: Yes, Mother. She has come fully prepared for it. The Mother agreed. After the initiation was over, Annapurna's mother began to talk about the girl and said, "She is not an ordinary girl. After reading about Sri Ramakrishna, she became eager for practising spiritual austerities. She cut her long hair, dressed herself as a man and set out on a pilgrimage. She went as far as Baidyanath, over two hundred miles from Calcutta. She entered a wood and. was resting there when the Guru of her mother happened to pass that way. The Guru inquired where she was staying and informed her father. In the meantime she was kept with the Guru. Later on, her father went there and took back the girl."

The Mother heard these words in silence and then remarked: "Ah! What devotion!" Other devotees present there, said, "Goodness gracious! Such a beautiful girl! How could she go out alone even with all her eagerness and devotion?" Nalini said, "It would surely have created a great scandal in our part of the country."

After the noonday meal all of us lay down to rest in the adjacent room. The Mother also requested her new disciple to rest for a while. She said that she was not in the habit of lying down during the day-time. I said that she should obey the order of the Holy Mother. She agreed but after a few minutes left the bed and went to the porch. The Holy Mother remarked, "She is restless. That is why she had left home." She asked the maid of the girl, "What is the occupation of her husband? Why does he not keep her near him?" "He gets a small salary," replied the maid, "besides, there is no one in his family. He

cannot keep the girl alone in the house. Therefore she lives with her father. The husband visits the house of the father-in-law every week-end." Annapurna's mother said, "This girl says to her husband, 'You are not my husband. The Lord of the world alone is my lord.'" The Holy Mother kept quiet without giving any reply.

The women devotees were talking in the northern porch of the shrine room. That created a great deal of noise. The Mother told' someone, "Go and ask them to talk in low tones. They are disturbing Swami Saradananda." There was no one in the room. I asked her a few questions regarding spiritual practices. The Mother said, "Do not make any distinction between Sri Ramakrishna and me. Meditate on and pray to the particular aspect of the Divinity revealed to you. Worship ends with absorption in meditation. Start here (the heart) and end here (the head). Neither Mantra nor scripture is of any avail; Bhakti or devotion alone accomplishes everything. Sri Ramakrishna is every thing—both Guru and Ishtam. He is all in all."

Then the conversation drifted to Gauri-Ma and her disciple, Durgadevi. The Mother spoke highly of both. She said, "Listen, my child. Many may take the name of God after their minds have been hardened by the contaminating influence of the world. But he alone is blessed who can devote himself to God from very childhood. The girl is pure like a flower. Gaurdasi has moulded her character nicely. Her brothers tried their utmost to arrange for her marriage, but Gaurdasi took her from place to place and concealed her. At last she took her to Puri and made her exchange garlands with Jagannath and made her a nun. That is to say, she was married to Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe. Thenceforth she has been leading the life of a nun. Such a nice, pure girl! She has been well-educated. 'I have heard that she is preparing herself for a Sanskrit examination. I also heard from her many incidents of Gauri-Ma's early years and thus came to know that she also had to pass through a stormy life."

A little later, four or five women devotees came. They offered the Holy Mother green cocoanuts and some other fruits. One of them was about to approach and touch her feet. The Mother said, "Please salute me from a distance." They offered her a few coins. She forbade them to do so. They then wanted some spiritual instruction. The Mother replied with a smile, "What shall I instruct you about? The words of Sri Ramakrishna have been recorded in books. If you can follow even one of his instructions, you will attain to everything in life." After they had taken leave, the Holy Mother

said, "Where is that competent student who can understand spiritual instruction? First of all, one should be fit; otherwise, the instructions prove futile."

Annapurna's mother entered the room and said. "Mother, I saw you in a dream asking me to take your Prasada, which would cure me of my disease. But Sri Ramakrishna had forbidden me to eat the Prasada of anybody. Still I shall be glad if you will kindly give me a little of your Prasada." The Mother refused to do so, but the woman began to insist upon it.

Mother: Do you want to disobey Sri Ramakrishna?

A.'s Mother: Sri Ramakrishna's words were applicable so long as I made a distinction between him and you. But I now realize both of you to be identical. So please give me your Prasada. The Mother had to yield. A little later we took leave of her.

Another day when I went to see the Holy Mother, she inquired about my husband. I said that he was not in very good health. She asked me to write a letter for her. She dictated it. After the noonday meal, the Mother had been resting for a while when a few women devotees came to her room. When the greetings were over, one of them said, "I have a nice goat. She gives four pounds of milk daily. I also keep three birds. I spend my time with these. I am now pretty old." I was reminded of the words of Sri Ramakrishna: "Mahamaya, the supreme power of cosmic illusion, makes us bring up a cat and thus forget God. This is how this world is going on." The Holy Mother simply nodded to the words of these devotees. Alas, what a great agony she had to bear for our sake! We did not allow her even to enjoy a little rest. We disturbed her with mere idle gossip. I took leave of her in the evening.

I went to see the Holy Mother again after many days. She had gone back to her country home on 26th February, and had returned to Calcutta in September, 1913, a few days before the Durga Puja. I visited her one afternoon and found a woman kneeling near her feet and begging with tears for initiation. The Mother was seated on her bedstead. She refused to comply with her prayer and said, "I have already told you that I would not be able to initiate you now. I am not well." The woman was insistent. The Mother felt annoyed and said, "You think only of yourselves. You are perfectly satisfied if you get the sacred Mantra. But you never think of the consequence." But the woman was inexorable. All of us felt disgusted. The Holy Mother at last

asked her to come another day. Then the woman requested her to ask one of the monks to give her initiation.

Mother: Suppose they refuse?

Woman: What do you mean, Mother? They must obey you.

Mother: In this matter they may refuse to comply with my request.

Finding the woman unrelenting, the Mother said, "Well, I shall ask Khoka (Swami Subodananda.) He will initiate you." But the woman started insisting again and said, "I shall be happy to be initiated by you. You can certainly fulfil my desire if you like." She brought out ten rupees and said, "Here is some money. You may purchase the necessary articles for initiation." We all felt mortified at her impudence. At last the Mother was angry and said severely, "What? Do you mean to tempt me with money? You cannot coax me with these coins. Take them back." The Holy Mother immediately left the room. Being hard pressed by the woman, the Holy Mother at last agreed to initiate her on the sacred Mahashtami day. She soon took leave of us. The Mother now found some leisure to talk to me.

I came to see the Mother after two months and a half. She cried, "Oh! It is almost an age since I have seen you!" In the course of the talk I asked her about the woman whom she had consented to initiate.

Mother: She could not come here on the appointed day. I had said to her, "I am now ill. Let me be well and then I shall initiate you." My words came to be true. She could not come on the Mahashtami day as she herself fell ill. She came here many days later and was initiated.

Devotee: That is right. The words that are once uttered by you cannot but be fulfilled. We suffer as we go counter to your wishes. Many a time, you condescend to initiate people even while you are ill, and thus suffer all the more by transferring their sufferings to yourself.

Mother: Yes, my dear child. Sri Ramakrishna also used to say, "Otherwise why should this body have suffered at all?" The other day I was ill with an attack of diarrhoea.

My sister-in-law was with me. Referring to her, the Mother said, "A very nice and quiet girl. There is only one dish of vegetable. If that be not palatable, then the whole dinner is spoiled." She meant that I had only one sister-in-law in the family. My life could have been made unhappy if she had not been good to me.

February, 1914

I went to Baghbazar one morning with a basket of flowers. I offered it to the Holy Mother. She was exceedingly happy and began to decorate the image of Sri Ramakrishna with the flowers. Some of them were blue. She took these in her hands and said, "Ah, what a pretty colour! There was a girl at Dakshineswar named Asha. One day, she came to the temple-garden and picked a red flower from a plant with dark leaves. She cried, 'Dear me! Such a red flower on a plant with dark leaves! Goodness gracious! What a strange creation of God!' Sri Ramakrishna saw her and said, 'My dear child, what is the matter with you? Why are you weeping like that?' She could hardly utter a word. She was weeping incessantly. Sri Ramakrishna at last pacified her."

The Holy Mother was in an exalted mood and said, "Look at these flowers with a blue colour! How can one decorate God without such fine flowers!" She took a handful of them and offered them to the image of Sri Ramakrishna. A few flowers dropped at her feet before they were offered. She cried, "Dear me! How they have dropped at my feet before I could offer them to the Lord!" "It is very nice," I said. Then I thought, "To you Sri Ramakrishna may be a higher being; but we do not make any distinction between you and him."

A widowed lady came into the room. I asked the Mother about her. The Mother said, "She took initiation from me about a month ago. She had accepted another Guru before. She later felt that it was a mistake and came here for initiation. I could not convince her that all teachers are one. The same power of God works through them all."

We were resting after the midday meal and the talk turned to Kamarpukur. The Holy Mother said: "While I was quite young, the Master once came to Kamarpukur with stomach trouble. During the early hours of the morning he would wake up from sleep and tell us about the dishes I should prepare for his midday meal. I would follow his directions. One day I found that I had not a particular spice with which he wanted the vegetables flavoured. My

sister-in-law (Sri Ramakrishna's elder brother's wife) asked me to cook without that spice. The Master heard those words and said, 'How is it? If you have not the spice, get it from the market. It is not proper to cook the curry without the spices necessary for it. I sacrificed the rich dishes of Dakshineswar temple and came here for the flavour of that spice, and you want to deprive me of that! That won't do.' My sister-in-law felt abashed and sent for the spice.

"The Brahmani (i.e. Yogesvari, the Sannyasini who instructed Sri Ramakrishna in Tantric practices) was then with us. The Master addressed her as mother, and I therefore looked upon her as my mother-in-law. I was rather afraid of her. She was very fond of red pepper. She used to cook her own dishes-all hot stuff. Often she offered me these preparations. I would silently eat them and wipe out the tears from my eyes. When she asked me how I liked them, I said in fear, 'Very nice!' My sister-in-law, however, would remark, 'Oh! They were very hot!' I noticed that the Brahmani was displeased at such remarks. She would say, 'Why do you say so? My 'daughter' approves of these dishes. Nothing can please you. I will not give you my curries any more."

The conversation again turned to flowers. The Mother said, "One day while living at Dakshineswar, I made a big garland of seven strands with some jasmine and rangam (Ixora). I soaked the garland in water in a stone bowl and quickly the buds turned into full blossoms. I sent the garland to the Kali temple to adorn the image of the Divine Mother. The ornaments were taken off from the body of Kali and She was decorated with the garland. Sri Ramakrishna came to the temple. He at once fell into an ecstatic mood to see the beauty of Kali so much enhanced by the flowers. Again and again he said, 'Ah! These flowers are so nicely set off against the dark complexion of the Divine Mother! Who made the garland?' Someone mentioned me. He said, 'Go and bring her to the temple.' As I came near the steps, I found some of the men devotees there—Balaram Babu, Suren Babu and others. I felt extremely bashful and became anxious to hide myself. I took shelter behind the maid, Brinde, and was about to go up the temple by the back steps. Sri Ramakrishna noticed this instantly and said, 'Don't try those steps. The other day a fisherwoman was climbing those steps and slipped. She had a terrible shock, fractured her bones and died. Come by these front steps.' The devotees heard those words and made way for me. I entered the temple and found Sri Ramakrishna singing, his voice trembling with love and emotion."

A few women devotees now entered the room and the conversation stopped. It was time for me to take leave. Again the Mother began to talk about God-realization. She said, "Do you know, my child, what it is like? It is just like a candy in the hand of a child. Some people beg the child to part with it. He does not care to give it to them. But he easily hands it over to another whom he likes. A man performs severe austerities throughout his life to realize God, but he does not succeed, whereas another man gets realization practically without any effort. It depends upon the grace of God. He bestows His grace upon anyone He likes. Grace is the important thing:'

Part 4: Recorded by Sarayubala Devi, Udbodhan Office, Calcutta.
May 1914

That day the Holy Mother was coming to our Ballyganj home. All the necessary arrangements had been made from the previous day. A separate seat, a new set of white marble vessels, etc., had been purchased for her use. The whole night I couldn't sleep for joy at the thought of the Mother's coming. She was to come only by noon, but under the impression that her arrival was to be earlier, Sri Shokaharan had gone to her Baghbazar house early in the morning and was waiting there with the carriage. We also finished our household duties early and were ready to receive her. I spread the Holy Mother's seat, decorated all-around with flowers, sprinkled Ganges water all over the house, and made a garland of flowers. On either side of her seat two large bouquets spread their fragrance.

As the time of her arrival neared, we were on the lookout, in eager expectation. At last the blessed moment arrived. Hearing the sound of the carriage, we all went downstairs. As the carriage stopped, I beheld the Holy Mother's smiling face casting a compassionate glance on us. When she got down everyone crowded round to take the dust of her feet. Seeing us all, her eyes were filled with tears of love.

Golap-Ma, the youngest aunt, Nalini-Didi Radhu and a few monks came with her. We led her upstairs, and after seating her, bowed down at her feet. The Mother said affectionately, "Have you all finished your meal?" With these words, she touched my chin endearingly. Till now I was too busy with the arrangements for the visit to think of meals or anything else. I now hurried downstairs to arrange for lunch.

Upstairs the gramophone was playing. Finding a little respite from work, I went up. Listening to the music of the machine, the Holy Mother was immensely pleased. "What a wonderful machine is this!" she said, bubbling with joy like a small girl. It was very hot. The Mother was reclining in the verandah on a mat. Near her all others were seated. In a stone pot iced water was kept, which the Holy Mother sipped now and then. Seeing me, she called, "Hullo, take a little ice water." I drank some as her Prasad and went to the kitchen.

After dusk, the offering to the Master was arranged in the next room. The Holy Mother came and asked Golap-Ma to make the offering but she declined. "You do it please. When you are here, why should I?" she said. So the Holy Mother sat down to make the offering. "How beautifully has everything been arranged!" she remarked. She was all praise for everything she saw and made us all immensely happy. Offering was over, and the Mother and the rest sat down to partake of the Prasad. The Holy Mother finished her meal first. She sat in an easy chair in the verandah and called to me, "Hullo, give me a betel roll." I was yet busy serving Golap-Ma. Quickly I took a betel roll to her. Ashamed that she had to ask for the roll, I said to Sumati, "Could, you not wait near the door with a betel roll? You saw how busy I was." A little later the Holy Mother came down. Taking a lamp, I also went with her.

It was time for departure. The Mother did not like to travel by car, as once a dog was crushed under her vehicle. But the distance was long and unless a car was used, she would reach her destination very late. So the Mother agreed to the devotees' request to use a car. She got ready, after making repeated Pranams to the Master. Blessing us all, she got into the vehicle.

* * * *

I saw the Mother one night. She was lying on her bed. Another woman was near her. She at once sat up in bed so that I might bow before her. In the course of conversation she said, "At the time of creation, people were born with the quality of Sattva, light. They had wisdom from their very birth. Consequently they at once realized the unreal nature of the world. They renounced it and practised austerity. They were liberated in no time. The Creator found that the purpose of his creation was going to be frustrated. These wise men, who were thus liberated, were unfit for the continuance of the play of the world. Then he again started the work of creation and mixed the qualities of Rajas, (activity) and Tamas (inertia) with, the Sattva. Thus His purpose was fulfilled." Then she cited a popular verse bearing on the theme of creation, and said, "In our young age we acquired these ideas from the country dramas. But now these have become rare."

Some of the young girls, relatives of the Holy Mother, were reading loudly from a book in another room. The Mother said, "Listen, how loudly they are

reading! They have forgotten that there are many people on the ground floor."

Radhu's mother, the insane sister-in-law of the Holy Mother, entered the room and said, "Lakshmi-mani (Sri Ramakrishna's niece) is going to Navadvip on a pilgrimage. I wanted to go with her. But you have stood in my way." She left the room in a pique. The Mother said, "How can I allow her to go with Lakshmi? Lakshmi is a devotee. She would sing and dance with other devotees. She would not observe the distinction of caste and would dine with others. But Radhu's mother would not understand this. She hardly knows that the devotees need not observe caste rules among themselves. So she would come back and criticize the conduct of Lakshmi before others. Have you met Lakshmi?"

Devotee: No, Mother.

Mother: She is in Dakshineswar. Visit her one day. Have you been to Dakshineswar?

Devotee: Yes, Mother, I have visited the place many a time. But I did not know that she had been living there.

Mother: Have you seen the Nahabat at Dakshineswar, where I used to stay?

Devotee: Yes, Mother, I have seen it from the outside.

Mother: When you visit the place another day, go inside the room. When I stayed there, my entire world consisted of that small room. Even the vessel containing fish was hung up. I had never seen water taps before. I came to Calcutta one day and entered a room where there was a tap. I opened the tap. Before the water rushed out, there came a hissing sound, like that of a snake, out of the tap. I was terror-stricken and ran from the room. I at once came to the other ladies of the house and cried, "There is a snake in that water pipe. It is hissing." They laughed and said, "There is no snake there. Do not be afraid. The hissing sound comes from the air being forced out by the rushing water." Then we laughed and laughed till our sides began to ache.

Saying this, the Holy Mother laughed heartily again. So sweet and innocent a laughter! I too could not hold back my laughter any more and thought, "So guileless is our Mother!"

Mother: Have you seen Sri Ramakrishna's birthday festival at Belur?

Devotee: No, Mother. I have never been to the monastery at Belur. I have heard that the monks who live there do not like a crowd of women in the monastery. Therefore I hesitate to go there.

Mother: Go there once and see the celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday.

* * * *

It was evening when I went to Baghbazar to see the Holy Mother. She was kind enough to ask me to spread her small carpet on the floor and fetch her beads. She soon became absorbed in her meditation. Across the lane there was an open space. A few labourers lived there with their families. One of the male members began to beat a woman severely, probably his wife. Slaps and fisticuffs began to be showered upon her. Then he kicked her with such force that she was thrown to a distance with a child in her arms. Then he started kicking her again. The Mother could not proceed with her meditation any more. Though she was extremely modest and would not usually talk even loud enough to be heard by people on the ground floor, she now came to the porch of the second floor, stood by the iron railing, and cried aloud in a tone of sharp reprimand, "You rogue! Are you going to kill the girl outright? I am afraid she is already dead!" Hardly had the man looked at her than he became quiet like the snake before its charmer, and released the woman. The sympathy of the Mother made the woman burst into loud sobs. We heard that her only fault was that she had not cooked in time. Afterwards the man became his old self again and wanted to be at peace with the woman. The Holy Mother saw this and came back to her room.

Some time later, the voice of a beggar was heard in the lane. He was crying, "Radha-Govinda! Glory unto God! Please be kind to the blind." The Mother said. "This beggar passes yonder lane almost every night. At first he would cry, 'Please be kind to the poor blind.' But Golap one day rightly said to him, 'Please utter that name, Radha-Krishna-the name of God. This will serve the double purpose of uttering the holy name and also of reminding the householders of God. Otherwise you will, day and night, think of your blindness alone.' Since then, the blind man, while passing through this lane,

takes the name of God. Golap gave him a piece of cloth. He also gets alms in other forms."

* * * *

I went to Baghbazar one evening and heard the Holy Mother saying, "New devotees should be given the privilege of service in the shrine room. Their new zeal makes them serve the Lord carefully. The others are tired of service. Service, in the real sense of the word, is not a joke. One should be extremely careful about making His service perfectly flawless. But the truth is, God knows our foolishness and therefore He forgives us." One woman devotee was near her. I do not know if these words were directed towards her. The Mother was asking her to be careful in picking the right kind of flowers and in making sandal paste for the purpose of worship, as also in not touching any part of the body, cloth or hair while working in the shrine. "One must work in the shrine room with great attention," said she, "Offerings and the rest should be made the proper time."

* *

It was half-past eight in the evening when I came to the place of the Holy Mother. She was absorbed in meditation in the porch to the north of the shrine room. We waited for a while in another room. The Mother came there and said with a smile, "I am glad to see you, my child."

Devotee: I have brought my sister with me, Mother. Is Aratrika (the evening service) over?

Mother: No. You may witness it now. I shall join you presently.

The evening service soon commenced. Many ladies sat in the shrine room and began to pray. After the worship was over, we prostrated before the image and came to the adjacent room to meet the Holy Mother.' While we were at her place we were unwilling to lose sight of her even for a moment.

A few minutes later, the Mother came to the room. An old lady was learning a devotional song from another. The Mother said. "I am afraid she may not be able to teach the song correctly. Ah, what a great singer the Master was! His voice was so sweet. While singing he would be one with his song. His voice is still ringing in my ears. When I remember it, other voices appear so

flat. But Naren also had a melodious voice. Before leaving this city he came to see me and sang a few songs. While taking leave of me he said, 'Mother, if I can return as a man in the true sense of the term. I shall see you again; otherwise good-bye!' what do you mean, my child?' I cried. 'Well,' he replied, 'I shall soon come back through your grace.' Girish Babu also' had a sweet voice."

Radhu came to the room and requested the Mother to lie down by her. She said, "You go and lie on the bed. These devotees have come from a distance. I should like to sit with them for a while." Radhu still insisted. I said, "Let us also go to your bedroom. You may lie there on your bed." The Mother asked us to follow her. The Mother lay on her bed and began to talk to us about various things. I was fanning her. She said after a few minutes, "It is now cool. Please do not take any more trouble." I rubbed her feet. An old lady was explaining to another about the six centres as described in Yoga. Golap-Ma forbade her to do so. But still she continued. The Mother heard her words and said to me with a smile, "Sri Ramakrishna with his own hands drew for me the picture of Kundalini and the six Yogic centres." I asked her if she still had the picture with her. The Mother replied, "No, my child. I had then no idea of the devotees coming to us. I have lost the paper."

It was eleven o'clock at night. We prostrated before her and took leave of her. The Mother sat on her bed and blessed us. She called me aside and said, "Spiritual progress becomes easier if husband and wife agree in their views regarding spiritual practices."

October-November, 1914

We had plenty of flowers at our Ballygunj home. The Holy Mother was always pleased with flowers. One day I gathered a large quantity of them and came to see her. I found her just ready for the worship. I arranged the flowers, and she sat on the carpet before the image. I forgot to keep aside some flowers for worshipping the feet of the Holy Mother. So I was sorry to think that it would not be possible for me to worship her that day. But I soon found out that she had anticipated my secret desire. She herself had separated some flowers on the tray. After the worship was over, she said to me, "Now, my dear child, I have kept those flowers in the tray for you. Bring them here." Just then a devotee came to see the Mother with a large quantity of fruits. She was very pleased to see him. She put a mark of sandal paste on his forehead and stroked him by touching the chin. I had never seen

her express her affection for any man devotee in such a manner. Next she asked me to hand over a few flowers to him. He accepted them. I found his whole body trembling with devotional fervour. With great joy he offered those flowers at her feet and left after accepting the Prasada. She sat on the cot and invited me very tenderly to come to her. I worshipped her feet. With great love, she placed her hand on my head and kissed me. I was deeply touched by her blessings.

After a while I found her on the roof drying her hair. She invited me to come near her and said, "Take off the cloth from your head and dry your hair, otherwise it may affect your health." Golap-Ma came to the roof and requested the Mother to make an offering of food in the shrine room. The Mother came down from the roof. I also followed her after a while to the shrine room. Like a bashful young bride, she was saying to Sri Ramakrishna in a soft voice, "Come now; your meal is ready." Then she came to the image of Gopala and said, "O my Gopala, come for your meal." I was just behind her. Suddenly she looked at me and said with a smile, "I am inviting them all to their noonday meal." With these words, the Holy Mother entered the room where the food was offered. Her earnestness and devotion made me feel that the Deities, as it were, listened to her words and followed her to the offering room. I was pinned to the ground with wonder!

After the offering was over, we all sat together for our meal. Then the Mother asked me to rest for a while. A man came with a basket of fruits. The fruits were meant for offering. He asked the monks what he should do with the basket. They told him to throw it out in the lane. The Mother got up and went to the porch. She looked at the lane and said to me, "Look there. They have asked him to throw away such a nice basket! It does not matter for them in the least. They are all monks and totally unattached. But we cannot allow such a waste. We could have utilized the basket at least for keeping the peelings of the vegetables." She asked someone to fetch the basket and wash it. The basket was kept for some future use. I learnt a lesson from her words. But we are so slow to learn.

After some time a beggar came to the house and shouted for some alms. The monks felt annoyed and said rudely, "Go away now. Don't disturb us." At these words the Holy Mother said, "Did you hear their remarks? They have driven away the poor man. They could not shake off their idleness and give something to the beggar. He only wanted a handful of rice. And they could not take the trouble to do this bit of work. Is it proper to deprive a man of

what is his due? Even to the cow we owe these peelings of the vegetables. We should hold these near her mouth."

Year 1917

I went to see the Holy Mother in the evening. I had been residing at our Baghbazar house at that time and I visited her almost every day. Finding her alone I narrated to her a dream and said, "Mother, one night I saw Sri Ramakrishna in a dream. You had been living then at Jayrambati. I saluted him and asked, 'Where is the Mother?' He said, 'Follow that lane and you will find a thatched cottage. She is seated in the front porch.'" .The Holy Mother was on her bed. With great enthusiasm she sat up and said, "You are quite right. Your dream is true." "Is it, then, true?" I said in surprise, "I had the idea that your home at Jayrambati is a brick building. But in the dream I saw the earthen floor, thatched roof, etc., and therefore concluded that it was all illusory."

In the course of conversation regarding austerity for the realization of God, she said, "Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma devoted a great deal of their time to meditation and the repetition of God's name. Yogin-Ma practised the greatest austerities. At one time she lived only on milk and fruits. Even now she spends much of her time in spiritual practices. The mind of Golap-Ma is hardly affected .by external things. She does not even hesitate to eat cooked vegetables purchased from the market, which a Brahmin widow would never touch. "

It was arranged to have devotional songs on the Goddess Kali sung that evening at the house of the Holy Mother. The monks of the Belur Math would take part in it. The music commenced at half-past eight in the evening. Many of the women devotees sat on the verandah to hear the music. I was rubbing oil on the Mother's feet and could hear the songs from the room. I had heard them many a time before. But that day those songs, coming from the mouth of the devotees, had a novel charm. They were full of power and thrill. My eyes became moist. They were singing now and then those songs which Sri Ramakrishna had himself sung. At such times the Holy Mother would cry out with enthusiasm, "Yes, Sri Ramakrishna would sing this song!" They commenced the song whose first line runs thus: "The bee of my mind has become fascinated with the blue lotus of the Divine Mother's feet!" The Holy Mother could not lie down any more. A few tear-drops trickled down her cheeks. She said, "Come, darling. Let us go to the

verandah." After the singing was over, I saluted the Mother and returned home.

Part 5: Recorded by Sarayubala Devi, Udbodhan Office, Calcutta.
22nd July, 1918

It was half past seven in the evening when I arrived at the house of the Holy Mother. Only two months back she had returned from her village home, emaciated by a protracted attack of malaria. She greeted me with her usual smile and said, "It is a very warm day. Take a little rest and refresh yourself. What about your sister? Has she reached home?"

Devotee: Yes, Mother. I started after she had reached home.

Mother: Take this fan from Radhu, and rub this medicated oil on my back. There are heat-blisters all over my body.

As I started rubbing the oil, the bell rang for evening worship. The Holy Mother sat on her bed and saluted God with folded hands. Other devotees went to the shrine room to witness the worship.

The Mother said, "Everybody says regretfully, 'There is so much misery in the world. We have prayed so much to God, but still there is no end of misery.' But misery is only the gift of God. It is the symbol of His compassion."

That day my mind had been greatly troubled. Did she really know it and therefore address those words to me? The Mother continued, "Who has not suffered from misery in this world? Brinde, the woman devotee of Krishna, said to him, 'Who says that you are compassionate? In your incarnation as Rama you made Sita weep for you all through her life. And in this incarnation of Krishna, Radha has been weeping on your account. Your parents suffered extreme agony in the prison of Kamsa and cried day and night uttering your name. Then why do I repeat your name? It is because your name removes all fear of death.' "

Referring to a woman, the Holy Mother said, "People of that appearance are generally devoid of Bhakti, devotion to God. I have heard it from Sri Ramakrishna."

Devotee 'Yes, Mother, I have read in the Kathamrita that he used to say that people who are not frank cannot make real spiritual progress.

Mother: Oh, you are referring to that. He said those words in the house of a devotee named Narayana. A man had a mistress. She once came to Sri Ramakrishna and said with repentance, "That man ruined me. Then he robbed me of my money and jewels."

Sri Ramakrishna was aware of the innermost contents of people's minds. But still he would like to hear about things from their own mouth. He said to that woman, "Is it true? But he used to give us tall talks about devotion." Then he described those traits which stand in the way of spirituality. In the end the woman confessed to him all her sins and was thus released from their evil effects.

Nalini: How is it possible, Mother? How can one be absolved from sin by simply expressing it in words? Is it possible to wash away sin in this manner?

Mother: Why not, my dear child? Sri Ramakrishna was a perfect soul. Certainly one can be free from sin by confessing it to one like him. And one thing more, if at a certain place people talk of virtue and vice, those present there must take a share of those qualities.

Nalini: How is this possible?

Mother: Let me explain. Imagine a man confessed to you his virtue or vice. Whenever you think of that man you will remember his virtuous or sinful acts. And they will thus leave an impression upon your mind. Is it not true, my child?

Again the talk turned to human misery, affliction and worry. The Mother said, "Many people come to me and confide their worries. They say, 'We have not realized God. How can we attain to peace?' Thereupon the thought would flash in my mind; 'Why do they say so? Am I then a superhuman being? I never knew what worry was. And the vision of God,—it lies, as it were in the palm of my hand. Whenever I like it, I can have it ' "

I had read of the Holy Mother's dacoit father. Wishing to hear of it from her, I said: "Mother, I read' about an episode in the book. You were once coming

to Dakshineswar. Lakshi-Didi and others were with you. You could not walk as fast as they. Seeing that night was approaching, you told them to go ahead and you were lagging far behind. At this time you met those who have come to be known as your dacoit father and mother."

Mother: It is not true that I was altogether alone. There were two other old women. The three of us fell behind. Then seeing that man with silver wrist bands, shaggy hair, dark complexion, and a long stick in hand, I was terribly frightened. In those days dacoities used to take place in that area. The man understood that, we were frightened and asked, "Hullo, where are you going?" I said, "To the east." The man responded, saying, "This is not the road, your path lies that way." Seeing that I did not proceed even then, he said, "Don't be afraid. There is a woman with me. She has fallen behind," Then I called him 'father', and took refuge in him. Was I like this in those days? How strong I was! I walked for three days at a stretch. I had walked around Brindavan and never felt tired.

Later the Holy Mother said: "Did you see the Nahabat at Dakshineswar? I used to stay there. The room was so low that at first I would knock my head against the upper frame of the door. One day, I got a cut on the head. Then I became accustomed to it. The head bent of itself as soon as I approached the door. Many stout aristocratic women of Calcutta frequently came there. They never entered the room. They would stand at the door and lean forward holding the jambs. And peeping in they would remark, addressing me, 'Ah, what a tiny room for our good girl! She is, as it were, in exile, like Sita.'" Turning to her nieces she continued, "You won't be able to stay in such a room even for a day." "True, aunt!" they ejaculated, "everything is different with you."

Devotee: I read in Gurudas Burman's book that finally they built at Dakshineswar a thatched house for you. The Master came there once, and because of heavy rain could not return to his own room.

Mother: What thatched house! It was just a small shed. All that is properly written in Sarat's book. M's book also is good. He has recorded the Master's own words. What sweet words! I heard that there is so much material that there could be four or five parts more. He has now become old; would he be able to do all that? Selling the book, he seems to have got much money. I heard that he has kept aside all that money. For my house at Jayrambati, he gave nearly a thousand rupees (for the house Rs.400 and for expenses

Rs.500). And every month he gives me ten rupees. If I stay here sometimes he gives twenty or twenty-five rupees. Earlier, when he was working as a teacher he used to give monthly two rupees.

Devotee: Is it Girish Babu who gave much money to the Math?

Mother: Not a large amount. It is Suresh (Surendra Nath) Mitra who gave regularly. But Girish, too, did give something. And he bore all my expenses at Nilambar Babu's house for a year and a half. He has not given any large sum to the Math. And wherefrom could he give? He never had so much money. Earlier he was a wretch and used to move in bad company, running a theatre. He was a man of great faith and so obtained the Master's grace. The Master gave him salvation. In each Incarnation He liberates one wretch, like Jagai and Madhai in the Incarnation of Sri Chaitanya. The Master once said this also, that Girish was an aspect of Siva. What is there in money, my dear? The Master could not even touch money. His hand used to curl back when any metal contacted him. He used to say, "The world is an illusion. Ah, Ramlal, if I felt that the world was real, I would have covered your Kamarpukur with gold. But I know that it is all illusion. God alone is real"

Maku, her niece, said sorrowfully, "I could not settle myself at one place! The Mother replied, "How is that? Wherever you live, you must feel quite at home. You think that you will be happy at your husband's place. How is that possible? He gets a small salary. How can you manage with such a pittance? You are staying with me. It is just like your father's place. Married girls sometimes live with their parents, don't they? Can't you practise renunciation a little?"

I requested the Mother to tell me something more about Sri Ramakrishna. "What the books say is not always correct," Mother said, "Ram's book does not give a correct description of the Shodasi Puja, when the Master worshipped me."

She described the incident and said, "It was not at home, it was at Dakshineswar, in the Master's room, near the circular verandah, where the huge pitcher of Ganga water now stands. Hriday had made all the arrangements."

Yogin-Ma was then standing by the window, and was about to say something. The Mother said, "Come in. I seldom see you now-a-days."

Yogin-Ma laughed and entered the room. Her foot touched my body. As she was about to salute me with folded hands, I interrupted her and prostrated myself before her. "What is this, Yogin-Ma?" said I, "I am not even fit to take the dust of your feet. Why should you salute me if your foot touched my body?" In reply Yogin-Ma said, "Why not? A snake, whether big or small, is a snake all the same. You are all devotees and therefore worthy of our respect." I looked at the Mother. The same compassionate smile lit her face. I took leave of her late at night.

28th July, 1918

It was evening when I visited the Holy, Mother at her Baghbazar home. Just before evening service an elderly widow came and saluted the Mother by placing her head on the feet of the Mother. The Mother was greatly annoyed and said, "Why do you touch the feet with the head? I am not doing well at all. This sort of thing makes me worse." The Holy Mother washed her feet after the widow had left the place.

Later, while I was rubbing the Mother's body with medicated oil, the conversation drifted to Lalit Babu, a great householder devotee. I said, "He was at one time fatally ill. But I heard that he recovered through your grace."

Mother: He had many unfulfilled desires. He was very seriously ill with dropsy and was on the point of death. He said to me in a very plaintive voice. "Mother, I have a great desire to build temples and hospitals at Kamarpukur and Jayrambati. But this great desire is not going to be fulfilled." Ah, Sri Ramakrishna saved his life that time. Now he wants to carry out his plans. Let him try. He has bought a tank for me.

30th July, 1918

Swami Premananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, passed away in the evening. I went to see the Mother at dusk. The Mother said, "Come in, my child. Take your seat. Today my Baburam (Swami Premananda) has passed away. I have been weeping since morning." She again burst into tears. Continuing she said, "Baburam was dearest to my heart. The strength, devotion, rationality and all the great virtues were embodied in him. He was the very light of the Belur Math. His mother came from a family without any male heirs. So she inherited her father's property. She became a little proud of it. She herself confessed it to me and said, 'I had some gold ornaments

and I thought of the world as a mere mud-puddle.' She left behind four children. The fifth one she lost before her own death."

After a while I saw the Holy Mother placing her head at the feet of the picture of Sri Ramakrishna hung on the southern wall of the room and uttering in a heart-rending voice! "Lord, you have taken away my Baburam!" I could hardly restrain my tears.

Golap-Ma was also seriously ill with blood dysentery. She was almost on her death-bed.

31st July, 1918

It was half past seven in the evening. The Holy Mother was seated in the shrine room. This day, too, her conversation turned on the late Swami Premananda. She said, "My child, in the body of Baburam there was neither flesh nor blood after his last illness. It was a mere skeleton." Chandra Babu came to the room and joined in our talk. He told the Mother that some devotees gave sandal-wood, butter, flowers, incense, etc., worth four or five hundred rupees for the cremation of the Swami's body. The Mother remarked, "Their money is, indeed, blessed. They have spent it for a devotee of God. God has given them abundantly and will give them more." Chandra Babu left the room.

"Listen, my child," she continued, "however spiritual a man may be, he must pay the tax for the use of the body to the last farthing. But the difference between a great soul and an ordinary man is this: The latter weeps while leaving this body, whereas the former laughs. Death seems to him a mere play.

"Ah, my dear Baburam came to Sri Ramakrishna while he was a mere boy. Sri Ramakrishna used to make great fun with the boys. Naren (Swami Vivekananda) and Baburam would roll on the ground with side-splitting laughter. While living in the Cossipore garden, I was once climbing the steps, carrying a pitcher with five pounds of milk. I felt giddy and the milk spilt on the ground. My heels were dislocated. Naren and Baburam came running there and took care of me. There was a great inflammation of the feet. Sri Ramakrishna heard of the accident and said to Baburam, 'Well, Baburam, it is a nice mess I am now in. Who will cook my food? Who will feed me now?' He was then ill with cancer in the throat and lived only on

farina pudding. I used to make it and feed him in his room in the upper storey of the house. I had, then, a ring on my nose. Sri Ramakrishna touched his nose and made the sign of the ring by describing a circle with his finger, in order to indicate me. He then said, 'Baburam, can you put her (making the sign) in a basket and carry her on your shoulder to this room?' Naren and Baburam were convulsed with side-splitting laughter. Thus he used to cut jokes with them. After three days the swelling subsided. Then they helped me to go upstairs with his meals.

"Baburam used to tell his mother, 'How little you love me! Do you love me as Sri Ramakrishna does?' 'How foolish!' she would reply, 'I am your mother, and I do not love you! What do you mean?' Such was the depth of Sri Ramakrishna's love. While four years old, Baburam would say, 'I will not marry, or else I will die.' When Sri Ramakrishna was suffering from cancer in the throat and could not swallow his food, he said one day, 'I shall eat later on in my subtle body through a million mouths.' Baburam, replying, said 'I do not care for your million mouths or your subtle body. What I want is that you should eat through this mouth and that I should see this gross body.' "

Golap-Ma had been suffering from an attack of blood dysentery. She was slightly better today. The doctor observed that it would take three months to be cured completely. The Holy Mother said, "Blood dysentery is not a simple disease. Sri Ramakrishna would often be down with that disease. It happened frequently during the rainy season. At one time he was rather seriously ill. I used to attend on him. A woman from Banaras had come to Dakshineswar. She suggested a remedy. I followed her directions and the Master was soon cured. The woman could not be seen any more. I never met her again. She had really helped me a great deal. I inquired about her at Banaras but could not find her. We have often seen that whenever Sri Ramakrishna felt the need, people would come of themselves to Dakshineswar and then disappear just as suddenly.

"I also suffered from dysentery, my child. The body became a mere skeleton. I would lay myself down near the tank. One day I saw my reflection in the water and noticed that all that remained of my body was only a few bones. I thought, 'Dear me! What is the use of this body? Let me give it up. Let me leave it here.' A woman came and said, 'Hallo, Mother! Why are you here? Come, let us go home.' She took me home."

Late at night, I took leave of the Holy Mother.

1st August, 1918

Today I found the Mother alone and therefore had a long talk with her. Our conversation drifted mainly to the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Perhaps, on account of the passing away of Swami Premananda, the Mother had been continually thinking of these monks. Referring to them, the Holy Mother said, "Sri Ramakrishna accepted his disciples only after thoroughly examining them. What an austere life they led at the Baranagore monastery after his passing away! Niranjan (Swami Niranjanananda) and others often starved themselves. They spent all their, time in, meditation and prayer. One day these young monks were talking among themselves: 'We have renounced everything in the name of Sri Ramakrishna. Let us see if he would supply us with food if we simply depend upon him. We will not tell anybody about our wants. We will not go out for alms!' They covered their bodies with sheets of cloth and sat down for meditation. The whole day passed. It was late at night. They heard somebody knocking at the door. Naren left the seat and asked one of his brother monks, 'Please open the door and see who is there. First of all, notice if he has anything in his hand.' What a miracle! As soon as the door was opened, it was found that a man was standing there. He had brought some delicious food from the temple of Gopala, on the bank of the Ganges. They were exceedingly happy and felt convinced of the protecting hand of Sri Ramakrishna, They offered that food to Sri Ramakrishna at that late hour of the night and partook of the Prasada. Such things happened many a time. Now the monks do not experience any such difficulty. Alas! What hardship Naren (Swami Vivekananda) and Baburam (Swami Premananda) passed through! Even my Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda), who is now the President of the Ramakrishna Mission, had to cleanse the pots and kettles, many a day. At one time Naren was travelling as an itinerant monk towards Gaya and Varanasi. He did not get any food for two days and was lying down under a tree. He found a man standing near with delicious food and a jar of water in his hands. The man said, 'Here is the Prasada of Rama. Please accept it.' Naren said, 'You do not know me, my good friend. You have made a mistake. Perhaps you have brought these articles for someone else'. The man said with the utmost humility, 'No, revered sir. I have brought this food solely for you. I was enjoying a little nap at noontime when I saw a man in dream. He said: Get up quickly; a holy man is lying under yonder tree; give him some food. I dismissed the whole thing as a mere dream. Therefore I turned on my side and again fell asleep.

Then I again dreamt of the man, who said, giving me a push: I am asking you to get up and still you are sleeping! Carry out my order without any more delay. Then I thought that it was not an illusory dream. It was the command of Rama. Therefore in obedience to His command I brought these articles for you; sir.' Naren realized that it was all due to the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, and cheerfully accepted the food.

"A similar incident happened another day. Naren was travelling in the Himalayas for three days without any food. He was about to faint when a Mussulman Fakir gave him a cucumber. It saved his life that time. After his return from America, Naren was one day addressing a meeting at Almora. He saw that Mussulman seated in a corner. Naren at once went to him, took him by the hand, and made him sit in the centre of the gathering. The audience was surprised. Naren said, 'This gentleman saved my life once.' He then narrated the whole incident. He also gave the Fakir some money. But at first he refused to accept the gift. He said, 'What have I done that you are so anxious to make me a gift?' Naren did not yield and pressed some money into his pocket.

"Naren took me to the Belur Math at the time of the first Durga Puja festival, and through me gave twenty-five rupees to the priest as his fee. They spent fourteen hundred rupees on that auspicious occasion. The place became crowded with people. The monks worked hard. Naren came to me and said, 'Mother, please make me lie down with fever.' No sooner had he said this than he was down with a severe attack of fever. I thought, 'Goodness gracious! What is this? How will he be cured?' 'Do not be anxious, Mother,' said Naren, 'I have myself begged for this fever. My reason is this. These boys are working hard. But if I see the slightest mistake, I shall fly into a rage and abuse them. I may even give them slaps. It will be painful to them as well as to me. Therefore I thought it would be better to lie down with fever for some time.' When the day's function was over, I came to him and said, 'Dear child, the work is over now. Please get up.' Naren said that he was all right and got up from bed.

"Naren brought also his own mother to the Math at the time of the Durga Puja. She roamed from one garden to another and picked chillies, egg-plants, etc. She felt a little proud thinking that it was all due to her son, Naren. Naren came to her and said, 'What are you doing there? Why do you not go and meet the Holy Mother? You are simply picking up these vegetables. May be, you are thinking that your son has done all this work. No, mother.

You are mistaken. It is He who has done all this. Naren is nothing.' Naren meant that the Math was founded through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna. What great devotion! . . . . My Baburam is dead! Alas! Who will look after the Durga Puja this year? "

Part 6: Recorded by Sarayubala Devi, Udbodhan Office, Calcutta.
6th August, 1918

When I went to-day to see the Holy Mother, I found her in the porch, absorbed in meditation. Some time after, five or six women devotees came to her to pay their respects. They prostrated themselves before the image of Sri Ramakrishna in the shrine room. The Mother asked them about themselves. Nalini introduced them. One of them had come to Calcutta for treatment. The doctor had diagnosed her trouble as tumour in the abdomen. He had asked her to be operated. She was extremely nervous about the operation. The Holy Mother did not allow any of them to touch her feet. I do not know the reason. They begged her again and again to let them take the dust of her feet. The Mother firmly asked them to bow to her from a distance. They pointed to the sick girl and said. "Please bless her so that she may be cured. May she be able to pay her respects to you again." The Mother answered them, saying, "Bow down before Sri Ramakrishna and pray to him sincerely. He is everything." The Holy Mother appeared to be restive and said to them. "Good-bye, my children. It is getting late for you."

After they had left, the Mother said, "Please sweep the room and sprinkle it with Ganges water. It is now time for food-offering for the Lord." Her order was at once carried out.

She lay down on the bed and gave me a fan, saying, "My child, please fan me a little. The whole body is burning. My salutations to your Calcutta! People come here and lay before me the catalogue of their sorrows. Again there are others who have committed many sinful acts. There are still others who have procreated twenty-five children! They weep because ten of them are dead! Are they human beings? No! They are veritable beasts. No self-control! No restraint! It is therefore that Sri Ramakrishna used to say, One seer of milk mixed with five seers of water! It is so difficult to thicken such milk. My eyes have become swollen by constantly blowing the fire to keep it burning. It is such a hard job to thicken such milk! Where are my sincere children who are ready to renounce everything for God? Let them come to me. Let me talk to them. Otherwise life is so unbearable.' These words are so true. Fan me dear. People have been streaming here today since four o'clock in the afternoon. I cannot bear the misery of people any more.

"The wife of Balaram also came here today. She is the sister of my Baburam. She wept bitterly for him. She said, 'Is he just an ordinary brother?' True, he was like a god."

14th August, 1918

I found the Holy Mother engaged in conversation with a widow, the sister of Dr. Durgapada Babu. The doctor's sister had become widowed at an early age. There was some trouble regarding the property left by her husband. She could not secure the probate of the will. They were talking about these things, and at last the Holy Mother said to the widow, "As you have no right to sell the property, I would advise you to place it under the care of a good man. A worldly-minded person can never be trusted in money matters. Only a real monk can resist the temptation of money.

Please do not worry so much, my child. Let the will of God be done. You have been following the right path. The Lord will never put you to any difficulty. You want to leave now? All right but write now and then, and come again."

After the widow had left, Shyamadas, the Ayurvedic physician, came to see Golap-Ma. The Holy Mother waited a while for him, but when she found that he had left, she lay down on her bed and, looking at me, said, "Now do your duty." I began to rub her body with the medicated oil. The Mother said, "The sister of Girish Ghosh was very fond of me. She would always keep apart for me a little of all the articles of food she cooked at home and send them here. A Brahmana would bring them, and she would sit by me as I ate them. Her love for me was deep. She had been married in an aristocratic family and owned considerable wealth; but her relatives had squandered away the money. Atul, the brother of Girish, started business with five thousand rupees. Besides, she had had to spend a large amount of money for her husband's illness which lasted for a year. In her will she expressed her desire to leave a hundred rupees for me. While alive she was ashamed to give me this amount. She thought one hundred rupees was too small an amount! After her passing, her brother came here and gave it to me. She had come to see me on the day previous to the Durga Puja. As long as she stayed, she never left me even for a second. I had planned to go to Banaras immediately after the Durga Puja. I was a little busy arranging my things and was moving from room to room. At last she said, 'May I take your leave

now?' I was a little absent-minded and said, 'Yes, go.' She hurried down the stairs. As soon as she left, I said to myself, 'What a foolish thing have I done! Did I say to her: Go. Never before did I say such a thing to anybody.' And, alas, she never came back. I do not know why such words came out of my mouth."

* * * *

I went to the Udbodhan Office in the evening. The Mother was lying in bed. Radhu also was lying by her side on another mat and was pressing her to tell a story. The Mother requested me to tell one instead. I was in a quandary. I did not know what to say. I knew the story of Mirabai, the great Vaishnava saint. I narrated it. As I recited the song of Mirabai which ends in the line, "God cannot be realized without love," the Mother cried out in an exalted mood, "Yes, it is very true. Nothing can be achieved without sincere love." But Radhu did not appreciate the story very much. Sarala at last came to my rescue. She told a story from the fairy tales. That pleased Radhu. The Holy Mother was very fond of Sarala. She had to nurse Golap-Ma who was ill, and so left the room after a while. Then Radhu asked me to massage her feet, but she was not pleased with my doing and requested me to give her a harder massage. The Mother said, "Sri Ramakrishna taught me the art of massaging by massaging my own body. Let me see your hand.' I stretched out my hand towards her. She showed me how to massage. Radhu fell asleep very soon. The Mother said, "The mosquitoes are biting my feet. Please pass your hand gently over them." She was quiet for a while and then said, "This year is a very bad one for the Belur Math. Baburam, Devavrata and Sachin have passed away."

I had heard that Swami Brahmananda had seen a disembodied form some days before the passing away of Devavrata Maharaj. I asked her about the incident. The Mother said, "Please talk softly, my child; otherwise they will be frightened. Sri Ramakrishna also often saw many such spirits. One day he had been to the garden-house of Benipal with Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda). He was strolling in the garden when a spirit came to him and said, 'Why did you come here? We are being scorched. We cannot endure your presence. Leave this place at once.' How could it stand his purity and blazing holiness? He left the place with a smile. He did not disclose this to anybody.

"Immediately after supper he asked someone to call for a carriage, though it had been previously arranged that he would spend the night there. A carriage was brought and he returned to Dakshineswar that very night. I heard the sound of the wheels near the gate. I strained my ears and heard Sri Ramakrishna speaking with Rakhal. I was startled. I thought, 'I do not know if he has taken his supper. If not, where can I get any food at this dead of night?' I always used to keep something in the stores for him, at least farina. He would ask for food at odd hours. I had been quite sure of his not coming back that night and so my store was empty. All the gates of the temple-garden were barred and locked. It was one o'clock in the morning. He clapped his hands and began to repeat the names of God. The entrance gate was opened. I was thinking anxiously what to do about his food in case he was hungry. He shouted to me, 'Don't be anxious' about my food. I have had my supper.' Then he narrated to Rakhal the story of the ghost. Rakhal was startled and said, 'Dear me! It was really wise of you not to have told me about it at that time. Otherwise my teeth would have been set on edge through fear. Even now I am seized with fear.'" The Mother ended the story with a hearty laugh.

Devotee: Mother, those spirits must have been foolish. Instead of asking him for their liberation, they told him to go away.

Mother: They will, no doubt, be liberated. His presence cannot be in vain. Once Naren (Swami Vivekananda) liberated a disembodied spirit in Madras.

I narrated one of my dreams to the Mother. I said, "Mother, I once dreamt that I was going to some place with my husband. We came to a river, the other bank of which could not be seen. We were going by the shady track along the river when a golden creeper so entwined my arms that I could not free them from it. From the other side of the river came a dark-complexioned boy with a ferry-boat. He said, 'Cut off the creeper fr6m your arm and then only will I take you across the river.' I cut off almost the whole creeper but the last bit I could not get rid of. In the meantime my husband also disappeared. In despair I said to the boy, 'I cannot get rid of this bit. You must take me to the other side.' With these words I jumped into the boat. It sailed and my dream vanished."

The Mother said, "The boy whom you have seen is none other than Mahamaya, the great cosmic Illusionist. She took you across the waters of the world in that form. Everything, husband, wife, or even the body, is only

illusory. These are all shackles of illusion. Unless you can free yourself from these bondages, you will never be able to go to the other shore of the world. Even this attachment to the body, the identification of the self with the body, must go. What is this body, my darling? It is nothing but three pounds of ashes when it is cremated. Why so much vanity about it? However strong or beautiful this body may be, its culmination is in those three pounds of ashes. And still people are so attached to it. Glory be to God!

"Once I spent a couple of months at Kailwar in the district of Arrah. It is a very healthy place. Golap-Ma, Baburam's mother, Balaram's wife and others were with me. The country abounded in deer. A herd of them would roam about in the form of a triangle. No sooner had we seen them than they fled away like birds. I had never before seen anything running so swiftly. Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'Musk forms in the navel of the deer. Being fascinated with its smell, the deer run hither and thither. They do not know where the fragrance comes from. Likewise God resides ill the human body, and man does not know it. Therefore he searches everywhere for bliss, not knowing that it is already in him' God alone is real. All else is false. What do you say, my child?"

The Holy Mother had nettle-rash all over her body. She said, "I have been suffering from this ailment for the last three years. I do not know for whose sins I have been suffering in this body. Otherwise how is it possible for me to get any disease?"

I went to see the Mother one evening and found that a number of girls from the Nivedita School had come. Among them were two girls from South India. When Mother learnt that they knew English, she said, "Let me see. Come on, translate this into English — 'I shall now go home.'" One of them did it. Mother said again, "'What will you eat at home? — how will that be in English?" Hearing the translation, Mother laughed heartily with joy. She asked them, "Can you sing?" When they answered in the affirmative, she asked them to sing a South Indian song. They began singing and Mother was delighted.

22nd August 1918

It was evening when I went to see the Holy Mother. She was lying on a mat on the floor near her couch. I prostrated myself before her and asked her in

the course of our conversation, "Mother, it is a long time since I had been to our home at Kalighat. Should I go there now?"

Mother: Why don't you stay here for a few days more? Once you go to Kalighat you will not be able to come here so frequently. If you fail to come for one day, I become very anxious. You were not here yesterday. I was worried to think that you might be unwell. If you had failed to come today, I would have sent someone to inquire about you. But if your husband be ailing, if you think that he wants your presence there, then you will have to go to Kalighat.

When I told her that there was no such difficulty, and that all I feared was popular criticism for staying too long with my sister, she asked me not to mind it and advised me to stay on at Calcutta for a month more.

A Brahmacharin came up and said to the Mother that a certain woman devotee wanted to see her. The Mother was very tired and lay on her bed. She was evidently annoyed and said, "Dear me! I am to see another person! I shall die!" She sat on her bed. A little later, a well-dressed lady entered the room and bowed down to her, touching the Mother's feet with her head.

"You could salute from a distance," said the Mother. "Why do you touch the feet?" The Mother asked her about her welfare.

Devotee: You know Mother that my husband has been ailing for some time past.

Mother: Yes, I have heard of that. How is he now? What is the trouble with him? Who is treating him?

Devotee: He has been suffering from diabetes. His feet have swollen. The doctors say that it is a dangerous disease. But I do not care for their opinions. You must cure him, Mother. Please say that he will be cured.

Mother: I do not know anything, my child. The Master is everything. If he wills, your husband will be all right. I shall pray to the Master for him.

Devotee: I am now very happy, Mother. Sri Ramakrishna can never disregard your prayer.

She began to weep, putting her head on the feet of the Holy Mother.

The Mother consoled her and said, "Pray to the Master. He will cure your husband. What is his diet now?"

Devotee: He takes luchi and such other things as are prescribed by the physician.

She soon took leave of the Holy Mother and went to see Swami Saradananda.

"I am burning day and night with the pain and misery of others," said the Mother, and took off the cloth from her body. I was about to rub her body with the medicated oil when a relative of the lady devotee who had just left, entered the room to salute her. She had to get up again. No sooner had she left the room than the Holy Mother lay down again and said, "Let anybody come. Whoever he may be, I am not going to get up again. What a trouble it is, my child, to get up again and again with my aching feet! Besides, I feel the burning sensation on my whole back due to the rashes. Please rub the oil well"

As I was rubbing the oil, the talk turned on the lady who had left. The Mother said, "Her husband is so dangerously ill. She has come here to pray to God for his recovery. Instead of being prayerful and penitent, she has covered herself with perfumes. Does this become one who comes to a shrine? Ah! Such is the nature of your modern people!"

As I was going to take leave of her, the Mother asked someone to give me Prasada.

23rd August 1918

I went to see the Mother in the evening. Referring to a woman devotee, she was saying, "She imposes very strict discipline upon her daughter-in-law. She should not go to such excess. Though she has to keep an eye upon her, she should also give her a little freedom. She is only a young girl. Naturally she likes to enjoy some nice things. If the lady becomes over-strict, she may go away from her or even commit suicide. What can she do then?"

Looking at me, she said, "She had painted her feet a little. Is it a crime to do so? Alas! She cannot even see her husband. The husband has become a monk. I saw my husband with my own eyes, nursed him, cooked for him and went near him whenever he permitted me. At other times, I have even stayed in the Nahabat for two months at a stretch without moving out. I bowed down to him from afar. He used to say, 'Her name is Sarada. She is Saraswati (Goddess of Learning). That is why she loves to adorn herself. He had told Hriday, 'See how much money is there in your box. Have a pair of nice gold armlets made for her.' He was ill then; still he arranged to get the ornaments made for me for Rs.300. And mind you, he himself could not touch money.

"After the Master's passing away, I was at Kamarpukur. I was to come here to Calcutta, but many people began to object, 'Oh dear, will you go and stay among those youthful boys!' But I made up my mind that I would stay here only. Still one has to respect what society says. So I asked many people. Some began to say, "Certainly you can go. They are all your disciples." I merely listened. There was an old widow (Prasannamayi of the Lahas) in our village. People used to respect her as a wise and pious person. Later I went and asked her opinion. She replied, 'Why, you may certainly go. They are your disciples, like your own children. What is there in this to ask? Of course you can go.' Hearing that all approved of my moving to Calcutta. And so I came. Ah, for my sake, out of devotion for their Guru, they cherish even a cat from Jayrambati.

"My mother used to lament, 'Oh, I gave my daughter in marriage to such a mad son-in-law. She could not set up a household, nor have children. She could not even hear herself called 'mother'.' One day the Master heard this and said, 'Oh mother! Don't grieve on that account. You will see that your daughter will have so many children that she would be tired of hearing the cries of 'mother, mother' from them.' What he said has literally come to pass, my dear."

A little later, as night approached, I took leave of her and came away.

Another evening it was raining heavily. I had a rain-coat on but still my clothes got wet at the edges. When I went to the Holy Mother, she burst out laughing at the strange appearance I presented in the rain-coat. But when she felt my wet clothes as I made pranam, she was immediately anxious. "Oh, you have got wet. Change your clothes quickly. Take Radhu's clothes," she

said. "There is no need to change clothes, Mother. I am not at all wet. Just see!" I assured her. The Holy Mother examined me closely and was satisfied.

The topic of conversation now turned to Jayrambati.

Mother: At one time a terrible famine devastated Jayrambati. People without 'number would come to our house for food. We had a store of rice from the previous year's produce. My father made Khichuri, cooking that rice and pulse together. The Khichuri used to be kept in a number of pots. All the members of the family would take only that Khichuri. The starving people would also eat the same. My father would however, say, "A little plain rice of good variety shall be cooked for my daughter Sarada (the Holy Mother). She will eat that." Sometimes the starving people would come in such large numbers that the food would not be sufficient for them. Then new Khichuri would be cooked, and when the hot stuff was poured in large earthen pots, I would fan and make it cool. People with hungry stomachs would be waiting for it. One day a low class girl came there. She had shaggy hair and blood-shot eyes like those of a lunatic. She saw the rice polishings soaking in a tub for the cattle and at once started eating it. We said to her, "There is Khichuri inside the house, go and eat it". But she was too impatient to wait. Is it a joke to bear the agony of an empty stomach? As soon as one takes a body, one takes on hunger and thirst also. This time at home when I was ill, one night I was so hungry! Sarala and all others were sleeping. Ah! They had toiled so long and slept. Could I wake them again? Never. So, lying down I felt all around. There was some parched rice in a dish and a few biscuits near the pillow. I was immensely happy. I ate that and drank water which was nearby in a pot. I was so hungry that I was not at all aware of what I ate.

Saying this she began to laugh and continued, "I had high fever that time. What severe illness did I have at Koalpara! I was unconscious; calls of nature had to be answered in bed only. That time Sarala and others served me in a spirit of dedication. (In a weeping voice) So I wonder if I have to suffer like that again! That time I was cured by Dr. Kanjilal's medicine. Oh! What a burning sensation all over the body! Sarat also came to serve me."

A little later I asked her, "Mother, why did you write to us from Jayrambati not to mix with that lady devotee?" "Her path is different," she replied, "She is not of this (The Master's) path."

Next day when I went to the Holy Mother, she was sitting in the verandah telling her beads. The Mother welcomed me, finished her Japa and touching the rosary to her forehead, put it away. At that time the area in front of Mother's house was vacant. Some labourers were living in huts towards the west of it. Referring to them she said, "They have laboured the whole day and are now sitting free from worry. The poor are indeed blessed." The words of Christ in the Bible occurred to me. Today I heard the same words from the Holy Mother also. A little later we came back to the room. The Mother laid herself down on her bed. Earlier in the morning, I had sent her some powder for her prickly heat. The Mother said, "I applied the powder you sent. The prickles are much less now. In this place it is more. Please apply there. Itching also is much reduced. Sarat also is suffering from severe prickly heat. Ah! If only some one would apply the powder on him also!" I said, "Oh, no, who will dare tell him of this matter? These things are used by fashionable people!" Hearing this Holy Mother began to laugh.

The rheumatism in the Mother's knee had increased. Yesterday a devotee's two children had given her electric treatment, which benefited her. They came today too. The younger aunt said, "My rheumatism also has increased from yesterday. I also will apply the battery." The Holy Mother heard it and said laughing, "Give it to her by all means." The two mischievous fellows quickly arranged their instruments and touched her feet with the wires. And what a shout it brought from the younger aunt! "Oh God, I am dead," she exclaimed, "My whole body is in jitters. Let me go, let me go." Everybody laughed hearing her cries.

Another day I had been to the Holy Mother's place, when a monk came and prostrated before her. He said, "Mother, why does the mind become so restless every now and then? Why can't I constantly meditate on you? Many worthless thoughts disturb my mind. Useless things we can easily obtain if we simply want them. Shall I never realize the Lord? Mother, please tell me how I can attain peace. Nowadays seldom have I visions. What is the use of this life if I cannot realize Him? It is better to die than to lead such a worthless life."

Mother: What are you talking of, my child? Do not even think of such things. Can one have the vision of God every day? Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Does an angler catch a big carp every day the moment he sits with his rod? Arranging everything about him, he sits with the rod and concentrates.

Once in a while a big carp swallows the hook. Many a time he is disappointed. Don't relax the practices for that reason. Do more Japa.

Yogin-Ma: Yes, that is true. The Name is identical with Brahman. Even if the mind be not concentrated at the outset, you will succeed ultimately.

Monk: Please tell me, Mother, how many times I should repeat the Name. That may help me to get concentration.

Mother: Ten thousand times, or even twenty thousand times or as many times as you can.

Monk: One day, Mother, I was kneeling in the shrine and weeping, when I suddenly saw you standing by my side. You said to me; "What do you want?" "I want your grace, Mother," I replied, " as you bestowed it on king Suratha." Then I added, "No, Mother, that was done by, you as Durga. I do not care for that form. I want to see you as you are at present." With a smile you disappeared. My mind became all the more restless. Now nothing satisfies me. Often I think, "If I cannot realize Her, then what is the use of this life?"

Mother: Why are you so restless, my child? Why don't you stick on to what you have got? Always remember, "I have at least a Mother, if none else." Do you remember those words of Sri Ramakrishna? He said he would reveal himself to all that take shelter under him, reveal himself at least on their last day. He will draw all unto Him.

Monk: I have been staying with a householder who is a great devotee. His wife comes from a very aristocratic family. She spends much money for me.

Mother: Ask her not to spend much money for you. The money of the devoted householders is for the benefit of the monks. Their money enables the monks to stay at a place for four months together during the rainy season. It is very inconvenient for the monks to go out (at that time) for begging.

The monk prostrated himself before the Mother and left the room.

Part 7: Recorded by Sarayubala Devi, Udbodhan Office, Calcutta.
3rd September 1918

I was in indifferent health for a few days. When I felt better, I went to see the Holy Mother one evening. In the course of conversation the Mother began to speak of Sri Ramakrishna.

Mother: (To me) What a good time we had yesterday! Sarala read about Sri Ramakrishna. How fine his teachings were! How could we know then that things would take this turn! What a great soul was born! How many people are illumined by his words! He was the embodiment of Bliss itself: All the twenty-four hours of the day were spent in devotional music, merriment, laughter, teaching and story-telling. So far as I remember, I never saw him worried by anything. Often he would tell me nice words of advice. If I had known how to write, I would have noted them down. Well Sarala, please read something today.

Sarala began to read from the Kathamrita, the Bengali original of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

"Do you notice those words," said the Mother, "which he addressed to Rakhal's father, ‘A good apple tree begets only good apples'? In this way he would satisfy him. When he would come to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna would carefully feed him with delicious things. He was afraid lest he should take his boy away. Rakhal had a stepmother. Whenever she came there, he would say to Rakhal, 'Show her everything. Take good care of her.'

Sarala was now reading about Brinde, the maid-servant. The', Mother said, "She was by no means an easy woman. A fixed number of luchis was set aside for her tiffin. She would be extremely abusive if anything was found wanting. She would say, 'Look at these sons of gentlemen! They have eaten my share also. I do not get even a little of sweets.' Sri Ramakrishna was afraid lest those words should reach the ears of the young devotees. One day, early in the morning, he came to the Nahabat and said, 'Well, I have given to others Brinde's luchis. Please prepare some for her. Otherwise she would indulge in abuses. One must avoid wicked persons.' As soon as Brinde came, I said to her, 'Well, Brinde, there is no tiffin for you today. I am just

preparing luchis.' She said, "That's all right. Please do not take the trouble. You may give me raw food-stuffs.' I gave her flour, butter, potato and other vegetables."

After finishing a chapter, Sarala went away to attend on Golap-Ma who was ill.

The Holy Mother began to speak in a low voice: "Sri Ramakrishna spoke about nothing but God. He used to tell me, 'Do you notice this human body? Today it is and to-morrow it is not. And coming to this world it suffers no end of misery and pain. Why should one worry about taking another birth? God alone is eternally true. If one can call on Him, it is good. Taking a body one has to suffer from its accompanying troubles!' The other day Bilas said to me, 'Mother, we have to be always very alert. We always tremble with fear lest we should think any unholy thought.' That is very true. A monk is like a bleached cloth, and the householder is like a black one. One does not notice the spots in a black cloth so much, but even a drop of ink looks so prominent on white linen. The monk's life is always beset with dangers. The whole world is engrossed in lust and gold. The monk must always practise renunciation and dispassion. Therefore Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'A monk must be always alert and careful.' "

In the meantime Harihar Maharaj came to the shrine for offering food. Pointing to him, the Mother said to me, "Look at this child who has renounced the world. He has left everything behind in the name of Sri Ramakrishna. The worldly men beget children without number, as if that is their only duty in this world. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'One must practise self-control after the birth of one or two children.' I have heard that the Englishman begets children according to the amount of his property. After the birth of the children they want, the husband and wife live separately, each one busy with his or her own work. And look at our race!"

The Mother continued with a smile, "Yesterday a young woman came to see me. She had a lot of children, some hanging from her back and some clinging to her arms. She could hardly manage them. Can you imagine what she told me? She said, 'Mother I do not at all enjoy this worldly life.' I said, 'How is that, my child? You have got so many young ones!' She replied, 'That is the end of it. I will not have them any more.' I said, 'It would be well if you could carry out your intention.'" The Mother began to laugh.

Devotee: Well, Mother, according to our Hindu conception, the husband is our most adorable Guru. The scriptures say that by serving him one can go to heaven, and even be united with God. Now if a wife, somewhat against the will of the husband, tries to practise self-control through prayer and spiritual pursuits, is she committing a sin?

Mother: Certainly not. Whatever you do for the realization of God cannot have any sinful effect. Self-control is absolutely necessary. All the hard disciplines enjoined upon Hindu widows are meant to help them practise self-control.

All the acts of Sri Ramakrishna were directed to God alone. He once performed the Shodasi Puja, making me the object of worship. I asked him what I should do with the bangles, the clothes and other articles of worship. After a little thought he said that I could give them all away to my mother. My father was then alive. Sri Ramakrishna said to me, "When you present your mother with these articles, don't think that she is an ordinary human being. Think of her as the direct embodiment of the Divine Mother of the Universe." I acted accordingly. That was the nature of his teaching.

4th September, 1918

The Mother was seated on her meditation carpet, counting beads. The evening service was over. A sister-in-law of the Mother came there and said to her, "Please set my mind right. I am full of worries. I do not wish even to live for a day. I shall make a will and leave all my property to you. After my death, you execute my will." The Mother laughed and said, "When are you going to die?" Suddenly she became grave and reprimanded her for her foolish thoughts, which she attributed to a heated brain and idle life.

Looking at me, the Mother smiled and said: "Do you notice, my child, the inscrutable play of Sri Ramakrishna? Look at my own relatives! See the evil company I am in! One is already mad and this one also is verging on insanity. And look at the third one (Radhu)! How much care I took to train her up, but all to no effect! She does not have the slightest trace of wisdom. Look there. She is standing in the porch, leaning against the railing and wistfully looking forward to the return of her husband. She is afraid that her husband may enter the house where that music is going on. Day and night she has been trying to keep him within her sight. What an inordinate attachment! I could never dream that she would be so much attached."

The woman relative of the Mother left the place with a sorrowful air and lay down on her bed.

Mother: My child, you have been extremely fortunate in getting this human birth. Have intense devotion to God. One must work hard. How can one achieve anything without effort? One must devote some time for prayer even in the midst of one's household duties. What shall I say about myself, dear? In those days, at Dakshineswar, I used to get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and sit in meditation. Often I used to be totally absorbed in it. Once, on a moonlit night, I was performing Japa, sitting near the steps of the Nahabat. Everything was quiet. I did not even know when the Master passed that way. On other days I would hear the sound of his slippers, but on this day, I did not. I was totally absorbed in meditation. In those days I looked different. I used to put on ornaments and had a cloth with red borders. On this day the cloth had slipped off from my back owing to the breeze, but I was unconscious of it. It seems 'son Yogen' (Swami Yogananda) went that way to give the water-jug to the Master and saw me in that condition. Ah! The ecstasy of those days! On moonlit nights I would look at the moon and pray with folded hands, 'May my heart be as pure as the rays of yonder moon!' Or, 'O Lord, there is a stain even in the moon, but let there not be the least trace of stain in my mind!' If one is steady in meditation, one will clearly see the Lord in one's heart and hear His voice. The moment an idea flashes in the mind of such a one, it will be fulfilled then and there. You will be bathed in peace. Ah! What a mind I had at that time! Brinde, the maid-servant, one day dropped a metal plate in front of me, with a bang. The sound penetrated into my heart. In the fullness of one's spiritual realization, one will find that He, who resides in one's heart, resides in the hearts of others as well—the oppressed, the persecuted, the untouchable and the outcast. This realization makes one truly humble.

Let my sister-in-law, who complains of mental worry, do likewise. Let her get up from bed at 3 o'clock in the morning and sit in the porch adjoining my room for meditation. Let me see whether she can still have any worry of mind. She will not, however, do that, but only talk about her troubles! What is her suffering? I never knew my child, what mental worry was. But now I have been suffering day and night because or my relatives. It was an unlucky time when this sister-in-law came to our family; all my sufferings are due to my efforts to bring up her daughter Radhu. Let them all go away. I do not

want anybody. Just look at these girls. They never listen to me. Such disobedient women!

Golap-Ma: Just see how they decorate their bodies! They think that is how they will get the love of their husbands.

Mother: Ah! How kindly Sri Ramakrishna treated me! Not even one day did he utter a word to wound my feelings. He would tell me, "One should always be active. One should never be without work. For when one is idle, all sorts of bad thoughts crop up in one's mind." One day he gave me some hemp and asked me to prepare some string suspenders with it. He said he wanted them to hang the pots of some sweets etc. for his young disciples. I made the suspenders accordingly, and with the fibre that was left, stuffed a pillow. I used to lie down on a stiff mat under which I spread some hessian, and placed that pillow under my head. Now you see all these beds and mattresses, but even at that time I used to sleep as well as I do now. I don't feel any difference, dear. People call me 'goddess,' and I too am led to think so. Or how could you explain all the strange things that have happened in my life? Yogin and Golap know much of this. I should but think, 'Let this happen' or 'I shall eat this', the Lord somehow fulfils these.

Ah, my dear! Those were unforgettable days in Dakshineswar! Sri Ramakrishna would sing and I would stand for hours together and watch the scene through the hole in the screen of plaited bamboo chips that surrounded the verandah of the Nahabat. I would salute him with folded hands from afar. Those days were indeed fun of bliss! People streamed in throughout the day, and religious talks went on continuously.

My child, this mind is just like a wild elephant. It races with the wind. Therefore one should discriminate all the time. One should work hard for the realization of God. What a wonderful mind I had at that time! Somebody used to play on the flute at Dakshineswar. As I listened to the sound, my mind would be extremely eager for the realization of God. I thought the sound was coming directly from God, and I would enter into Samadhi. I experienced the same ecstasy at Belur also. The place was then very peaceful and I was constantly in a mood of meditation. Therefore Naren (Swami Vivekananda) intended to build a house there for me. The land on which this house stands was given by Kedar Das. But now the price of land has soared high; it is impossible to purchase a place now. All this has been done through the grace of God.

Just at that time, Maku, her niece, entered the room, with her child in her arms, and left the boy there, saying, "Mother, what shall I do? He does not sleep at all." The Mother said, "The child has the quality of Sattva, therefore he does not sleep."

The Mother had been suffering terribly from the pain caused by nettle-rash. At her bidding I rubbed her with medicated oil.

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One day the Mother was sitting in the northern verandah. A young man was speaking with her. He bowed low before the Mother and placing his head on her feet, said, "Mother, I have suffered much in the world. You are my Guru, you are my Ishta (Chosen Ideal)-and I do not care for anything else. Really, Mother, I feel too ashamed to speak to you about all the evil deeds I have committed. Yet, it is only your grace that has saved me." The Mother lovingly placed her hand on his head and said, "A son is always a son to the mother." The boy replied, "True, Mother. But because I have received so much of your grace, may I never imagine that your grace can be so easily available."

19th September 1918

It was nearly 8.30 p.m. A mat had been spread on the floor near the Mother’s bed, and she was about to lie down. No sooner did I enter the room, she said, "Come dear, come. Sit near me. Sarala, give her some refreshments. After a whole day's toil, my child has come here." I protested, but the Mother insisted saying, "One should take proper care of one's health." Then she mentioned her nettle-rash and said, "What to make of this, dear? People suffer from it and become well again; but once I catch it, it doesn't leave me. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that all sorts of people would come with their ailments, afflictions, sins and troubles and touch him, and all those things would take refuge in his body. It is true, my child; it may be the same case with me." The conversation then turned to Sri Ramakrishna.

Mother: Once when Sri Ramakrishna was lying ill at Cossipore, a few devotees brought some offerings for Mother Kali of Dakshineswar temple. On hearing that the Master was at Cossipore, they offered all the things they had brought before a picture of the Master, and then partook of the Prasada.

On hearing about this Sri Ramakrishna remarked, "All these things were brought for the great Mother of the Universe. And they have offered them all here (meaning himself)!" I was frightened very much at this and thought, "He is suffering from this dangerous disease, who knows what might happen?" What a calamity! Why did they do it?

The Master too was referring to this incident again and again. Afterwards at a late hour in the night he said to me, "You will see how in course of time I will be worshipped in every house. You will see everyone accepting this (meaning himself). This is surely going to happen." This was the only day I heard him using the first personal pronoun with reference to himself. Usually he would speak of himself not as 'I' or 'me', but as the 'case belonging to this', pointing to his body.

After the Master's passing, there was a quarrel as to who should get possession of some of the valuable things like his woollen wrapper, shawl and other garments. After all, it is the devotees who would look upon them as invaluable possessions and preserve them for all time. And it was they who finally gathered them in a box and kept them in the drawing room of Balaram Babu's house. 'But, O my daughter, who knew the Master's will! In Balaram Babu's house a servant stole away most of the things, and either sold them or disposed of them in some other way. It was not proper to keep such things in the drawing-room of a house. They ought to have been kept in the inner apartments of the house. What was left of those garments and other things of the Master is now being preserved at the Belur Math.

My father-in-law (i.e. Sri Ramakrishna's father) was a pious and spirited Brahmana. He never received gifts from anyone. He even prohibited his people from accepting any gift brought to his house in his absence. But as regards my mother-in-law, if anyone made a private gift to her she would accept it, cook it, offer it to the Deity, and then give it to others as Prasada. My father-in-law used to get angry if he happened to know of it. He possessed a burning devotion. That was why the Master was born in his family.

A woman named Hari Dasi wanted to go on a pilgrimage to Navadvip. She did not, however, actually reach there, but stopped at Kamarpukur. She loved me very much. She was a woman of great faith. She kept with her some dust gathered from the Master's birth-place and would remark, "This

itself is my Navadvip. Gauranga himself was born here. Why should I then go to Navadvip?" What a tremendous faith!

After the Master's passing a Sadhu, hailing from Orissa, was staying at Kamarpukur. I used to give him rice, pulses and other necessaries. I used to visit him both morning and evening and ask, "Revered sir, how do you do?" Ah, with what great difficulty I built a thatched hut for him! Every day the sky would be overcast with clouds, and it would seem as if it were going to rain just then. I would therefore pray with folded hands, "O Lord, wait a while, wait a while. Let me finish the cottage, and then let it rain in torrents if necessary." The people of the village helped me in the work by giving timber, straw and other necessary materials. Somehow the cottage was completed, but unfortunately it so happened that a few days after, the Sadhu passed away in that cottage.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that his body had come from Gaya. When his mother passed away, he asked me to offer Pindam (funeral cakes) at Gaya. I replied I was not entitled to perform those rites when the son himself was alive. The Master replied, "No, no, you are entitled to do it. Under no circumstances can I go to Gaya. If I go, do you think it will be possible for me to return?" So I did not want him to go there. And later on I performed the rites at Gaya.

28th September 1918

It was morning when I went to the Udbodhan office. The Holy Mother was peeling fruits for worship. As soon as her eyes fell on me, she said, "I am so glad to see you here. It is the day of the Bodhan. (I had entirely forgotten about it). Please arrange these flowers for the worship of Sri Ramakrishna, and keep the fruit tray on this side." I obeyed her orders. I then combed her hair. While combing, a number of her hairs came out. The Mother said, "Here they are! Preserve these." I felt myself really blessed. I had a strong desire for some of her hair.

Shyamadas Kaviraj, the celebrated physician, came to examine Radhu. When the examination was over, the Mother asked Radhu to bow before the physician. Radhu did as she was asked. After the physician had left the place, someone inquired, "Is the physician a Brahmana?"

Mother: No, he is a Vaidya.

Devotee: Why, then, did you ask Radhu to bow down before him?

Mother: Why should I not do so? The physician is so full of wisdom. He is equal to a Brahmana. To whom should one bow down if not to him? What do you say, my child?

30th September 1918

It was the sacred day of the Mahashtami. My sister and I arrived at the Udbodhan Office early in the morning. After a while, a few women devotees brought some flowers. They worshipped the Holy Mother and went to the Ganges for their bath. The Mother asked me, "Will you stay here today? It is the day of the Mahashtami." I answered in the affirmative. A few moments later, Revered Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) came there to salute the Mother. We retired into the next room. The Mother was seated on her bed, with her feet resting on the ground. Many devotees came and bowed before her.

Later on, we went to take our bath in the Ganges in the company of Maku and other women devotees. The Mother said she would finish her bath at home, as rheumatism prevented her from bathing in the Ganges every day. After returning we saw many women devotees worshipping the Holy Mother. Many of them brought new clothes as offerings. After the worship" they wrapped the body of the Mother with the clothes, as they do for the image of Kali at Kalighat. Then she laid the clothes aside, one by one. To some devotees the Mother would say, "It is a nice piece of cloth."

A Brahmacharin came to the room and said that the men devotees would come now to bow down before the Mother. What an impressive sight! With flowers, full-blown lotuses and Bel leaves in their hands, they came there one by one, and after worship and salutation, went away. Some time passed in this manner. The members of Balaram's family came and worshipped the Holy Mother.

I was the last to go to her. After the worship I wrapped her body with a cloth, when she said suddenly, "I will wear this cloth, as today I must put on a new one." She at once put on the cloth given by me. This brought tears in my eyes. After all it was an ordinary piece of cloth. There were so many costly clothes around her. I was the poor daughter of the Mother. Her

excessive affection for me made me bashful. The Mother said, "What a fine border this cloth has!"

A woman dressed in an ochre robe worshipped Mother and placed two rupees near her feet. The Mother said, "Goodness! Why should you do that? You have put on the ochre robe. You have Rudraksha beads on your arm." The Mother asked her about her spiritual teacher. In reply the woman said that she had not been initiated. "Without initiation," said the Mother, "and without any spiritual realization, you have put on this sacred robe. This is not proper for you. The robe you have put on is very holy. I was about to salute you with folded hands. All will bow down at your feet. You must acquire the power to assimilate the honour." The woman said, "I have a desire to be initiated by you."

Mother: How is it possible?

But the woman insisted. Golap-Ma supported her. The Mother seemed to yield a little. She said, "We shall think about it."

Gauri-Ma came with the girls of her Ashrama. They all worshipped the Mother, took Prasada, and went away.

After finishing the worship in the shrine room, Bilas Maharaj came there and whispered to the Holy Mother, "I do not know, Mother, if Sri Ramakrishna has accepted the food-offering to-day. An impure leaf, carried by the wind, dropped on the food. Why was it so? Many devotees brought offerings from home. I do not know what has happened." The Mother asked if he had sprinkled the water of the Ganges over the food. He answered in the affirmative and went away.' I felt troubled in mind to hear this.

The worship of the Holy Mother went on in the same way. No sooner had one heap of flowers and Bel leaves been removed, than a fresh pile was formed near her feet.

It was the time of the noonday worship, when a party of three men and three women from a distant part of the country came to pay their respects to the Holy Mother. They were very poor, all their possessions consisting of one piece of cloth each. They had begged their passage to Calcutta. One of the party- a man devotee was having a private talk with the Mother. There seemed to be no end to the conversation. The time for the noonday worship

was passing, and the Mother must perform it. The inmates of the Udbodhan Office became annoyed. One of them said to the devotee in unmistakable language, “If you have anything more to say, you had better come downstairs and talk to the monks." But the Mother declared with some firmness, "It does not matter if it gets late. I must hear what they have to say." She continued to listen to him with great patience. In a whisper she gave him some instructions. Then she sent for his wife as well. We inferred that they must have experienced something in dream. Later on we came to learn that they had received some sacred Mantra in dream. After about an hour they took leave of the Mother. The Mother said, "Alas, they are very poor! They have come here with great hardship."

After the noonday worship, we had our meal. The Holy Mother now wanted to have a little rest, and we retired into the adjoining room.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon. After the worship in the shrine, Rashbehari Maharaj said, "A European lady has come to pay her respects to you. She has been waiting for a long time." The Mother asked him to bring the lady to her. As she bowed down before the Mother, the latter clasped her hand as one does in shaking hands. The words of the Mother, that one should behave according to time and circumstance, were verified in this instance. Then she caressed the lady by touching the chin. The latter knew Bengali and said, "I hope I have not inconvenienced you by this visit. I have been waiting for a long time downstairs to see you. I am in great difficulty. My only daughter, a very good girl, is dangerously ill; so I have come here to crave your favour and blessings. Please be gracious to her, so that she may be cured. She is such a nice girl. I praise her because one seldom finds nowadays a good woman among us. I can vouch that many of them are wicked and evil-minded; but my daughter is of quite a different nature. Please be kind to her."

Mother: I shall pray for your daughter. She will be cured.

The European lady was much encouraged by this assurance from the Holy Mother and said, “When you say that she will be cured, she shall be cured. There is no doubt about it." She spoke these words thrice with great faith and emphasis. The Mother, with a kindly look, said to Golap-Ma, "Please give her a flower from the altar. Bring a lotus." Golap-Ma brought a lotus with a sacred Bel leaf. The Mother took the lotus in her hand and closed her eyes for a few moments. Then she looked wistfully at the image of Sri

Ramakrishna and gave the flower to the lady, saying, "Please touch your daughter's head with it." She accepted the flower with folded hands and bowed down before the Mother. "What shall I do with the flower after that?" she asked.

Golap-Ma: When it is dried, throw it into the Ganges.

Lady: No, no! This belongs to God. I cannot throw it away. I shall make a bag out of a new piece of cloth and preserve the flower in it. I shall touch my daughter's head and body every day with it.

Mother: Very well, do that.

Lady: God is the supreme Reality. He exists. I want to tell you something. A few days ago, my baby was bed-ridden with fever in the house. With great fervour I prayed to God, "O Lord! I believe in Your existence, but I want an actual demonstration." I wept and laid my handkerchief on the table. After a long time I was surprised to find three sticks in its folds. I gently touched the body of the baby thrice with the three sticks. Soon it was cured of the fever.

As she narrated the incident, tears trickled down her checks. She said, "I have taken much of your valuable time. Please forgive me." "No," said the Mother, "I am greatly pleased to talk to you. Come here again on Tuesday." The lady bowed down and took leave of her.

When I went to the Mother a few days after, I learnt that the European lady went to see her on Tuesday. The Mother had shown her special favour and initiated her. Her daughter too was cured of her illness.

24thMarch, 1920

The Holy Mother had been staying in her country home at Jayrambati. After about a year she returned in spring to Calcutta. She was extremely unwell, having been in the grip of malarial fever for a long time. I prostrated myself before her and she blessed me by placing her hand on my head. She asked me how I was. I offered her a little money and she accepted it. At the sight of her emaciated body, I lost all power of speech. I looked at her face wistfully and thought, "Alas, how pale and weak her body is!" My sister's maidservant was with me. She was about to touch the Mother's feet in

salutation, but she said to her, "You may bow from a distance." The maid bowed from near the door-step and went away.

The Mother was so weak that she felt it painful even to utter a word. I was seated on the floor. In the meantime, Rashbehari Maharaj came up and requested the Mother not to strain herself by talking; but the Mother now and then asked me about various things. I gave her very short replies. Then Radhu came with her child. I took him in my arms and gave him some cash as a present. Radhu insisted on his not accepting it. The Mother said, "What is this, Radhu? She is your sister. Why should you not accept the present when she gives it with so much love?" The Mother accepted the money herself. She felt so sorry for the sufferings of the child caused by his mother's and grandmother's negligence. Radhu protested in bitter words. The Mother said, "There is no use talking to her," and kept quiet. After a while Sarala and a few women devotees came there to see the Mother. She was lying in bed. She began talking with them.

30th March, 1920

I went to pay my respects to the Holy Mother after five or six days. She had had no fever for the previous two or three days, but she was much worried on account of Radhu and her incapacity to look after her little child. Moreover, today Radhu's hand had bumped against an iron railing and with the swollen hand dressed in a dirty linen soaked in castor oil, she came to the Mother's room to consult Dr. Kanjilal who had come to examine the Mother.

After Radhu's hand was properly dressed, the Mother lay down on her bed and asked me to rub her feet. While rubbing I asked her whether I could question her about something and if it would inconvenience her.

The Mother said, "No, not at all. Speak what you have to." J spoke to her about some experience I had, and at this the Mother remarked, "Ah, my daughter, can one experience such delight every day? Everything is real. Nothing is untrue. The Master is all—He is Prakriti, He is Purusha. Through Him you will achieve everything. "

Disciple: Mother, one day while doing Japa with great concentration, a long period of time passed quite unobserved. I had therefore to get up for attending to my household duties without carrying out the other items of

spiritual practices that you had instructed me to do. Was it wrong on my part to have done so?

Mother: No, no. There is nothing wrong in it.

Disciple: Someone told me that while meditating at the dead of night, he hears a mystic sound. Generally he experiences it as coming from the right side of the body; sometimes, (when the mind comes to a slightly lower plane), it comes also from the left side.

Mother: (after thinking a while) Indeed, the sound comes from the right side. Only when there is body-consciousness it comes from the left side. Such things happen when the power of the Kundalini is awakened. The sound that comes from the right side is the real one. In time the mind itself becomes the Guru. If one is able to pray to God and meditate on Him for even two minutes with full concentration it is very good.

I did not feel inclined to question the Mother on the significance of 'body-consciousness', for the Mother was not doing well.

I was about to take leave. Instantly the Mother raised her head from the pillow and said, "Well, my daughter, I have raised my head." She did so, because it is not the custom for a devotee to bow down to one lying. When I bowed down, she said, "Come again. Come a little earlier in the evening. Can't you finish your household duties a little earlier and come?"

Then taking the name of Durga as a prayer for my safety, she bade me adieu. Even after I had come to the verandah

I heard her uttering the name of Durga in a compassionate tone. What an unbounded love! So long as we were by her side, we forgot all the sorrows and sufferings of worldly life.

* * *

The Mother's illness showed no signs of abatement. Her body was getting weaker and weaker. I went to see her one afternoon. She was about to go for her evening wash. She asked me to help her to get up. She said, "I am getting fever very often and the body has become very weak."

* * *

Another day, when I visited the Mother, I heard the monks telling her, "Mother, after your recovery this time, we will not allow anyone to receive initiation from you. You have to undergo a lot of suffering by taking upon yourself the sins of your disciples." The Mother smiled softly and said, "Why, my dear children? Did Sri Ramakrishna come only to eat rasagollas'?" That silenced all. O Mother! How much indeed did you express in those few words: ignorant that we are, how little could we understand!

This reminded me of another episode. A woman from a respectable family had fallen on evil ways. But perhaps due to some merit of previous life, she fortunately came in contact with a holy man. Under his guidance, she realized her mistake and became repentant. He advised her to visit the Holy Mother.

One day she came to meet the Mother at the Udbodhan Office. She felt shy to enter the prayer-hall. So standing near the doorstep, she confessed to the Mother all her dark past, and said, "O Mother, what will be my fate? I am not even fit to enter this holy shrine to meet you." The Mother herself went forward and embracing the woman, told her lovingly, "Come, child, come inside. You have understood what sin is, and you are also repentant of your deeds. Come, I shall initiate you. Surrender everything at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. Why should you fear?"

Accepting the sins and afflictions of mankind on her own shoulders and raising the 'fallen', it is only the all-compassionate Mother, who can smilingly say, "Why! Did Sri Ramakrishna come only to eat rasagollas?"

14th April 1920

The evening Aratrika (vesper service) in the shrine was over. The Mother had fever. Rashbehari Maharaj was rubbing her hands and Brahmachari Varada her feet. They were taking her temperature, and the Mother was lying with her eyes closed. I stood by her side. Once the Mother asked, "Who is there?" Rashbehari Maharaj replied to her in a low voice. I heard that the temperature was 100.1 degrees.

Sister Sudhira was giving a treat to the girls of the Nivedita School, as it was the (Bengali) New Year's Day. So Sarala, the disciple who was attending on

the Mother, had gone to the school. The Mother asked Brahmachari Varada to bring Sarala from there; for, she had to feed Radhu's child. It was not yet time to feed the child but as he was weeping, Radhu wanted to feed him just then. The Mother tried to dissuade her. This only enraged Radhu who began to abuse the Mother. She said, "May you die, and I shall light your funeral pyre!" We were deeply pained to hear this. The Mother was so badly ill, and Radhu was abusing her in such a fashion at that time! Radhu however went on shouting out many more abusive words. Such conduct on her part had become quite frequent. The Mother, who had unbounded patience, would put up with such behaviour on all occasions. But this time, due to her protracted illness she too got annoyed and remarked, "You will realize the consequences of this afterwards! What a sad plight you will be in after my death, you will understand! I do not know how many kicks and thrashings with broom-stick are in store for you!"

At this Radhu became still more irritated and abusive. After a time Sarala arrived and fed the child. The experience of that day cast a gloom over my mind. The Mother asked me to rub her feet.

Just then Rashbehari Maharaj entered the room and began to fix up the mosquito netting. So I took leave of her and the Mother said by way of bidding farewell, "Come." This was the last command and the last word that I heard from her.

I had to return to my Kalighat residence. Afterwards for several days I could get no opportunity to visit her, due to the illness of many at home and other difficulties. I used to get regular information about her health, and came to know that she was sinking day by day. At the earliest opportunity I went to see her, my heart filled with the fear that we were to lose our most precious possession in life very soon. I was, however, still hoping against hope.

Section I: Second series - Conversations (Recorded by Swami Arupananda)

Part 1: Conversations (Recorded by Swami Arupananda)

JAYRAMBATI
1st February, 1907, 8-30a.m.

UNCLE Varada said to me "The Mother has sent for you."

I went inside the inner apartment and found the Holy Mother standing at the door of her room waiting for me. As I saluted her, she asked, "Where do you come from?" I told her the name of the district of my native village.

Mother: I suppose you are now reading the teachings of the Master.

I did not reply to these words. She spoke to me as if we had known each other for a long time. I still remember her tender and affectionate look.

Mother: Do you belong to the Kayastha caste?

Disciple: Yes.

Mother: How many brothers have you?

Disciple: Four.

Mother: Sit down and take some refreshments.

With these words the Mother spread a small carpet on the floor of the verandah and gave me some luchis and sweets that had been offered in the shrine on the previous night.

I told the Mother that I had walked all the way from Tarakeswar on the previous day, spending the night in the village of Deshra, to the northwest of Jayrambati, in the house of a young man whom I had met at the railway station of Haripal. The Mother listened to all this and said to me, after I had

finished my refreshments, 'Don't bathe now; you have walked a great deal.' Then she gave me a betel leaf to chew.

She sent for me again after the noonday worship. After the offerings were over, she first of all served me food. She served it with her own hands, on a Sal leaf on the porch of her room. "Eat well, and, remember, don't feel shy!" she said to me as I was enjoying the meal. Afterwards she gave me a betel leaf.

I went to the Holy Mother again at three or four o'clock in the afternoon and found her kneading dough for bread. She was seated on the floor, facing the east, her legs stretched out in front of her. The oven stood near her. Casting a benign glance upon me, she said, "What do you want?"

Disciple: I want to talk to you.

Mother: What do you want to talk about? Sit down here. She gave me a seat.

Disciple: Mother, people say that our Master is God Eternal and Absolute; what do you say?

Mother: Yes, he is God Eternal and Absolute to me.

As she had said 'to me', I went on, "It is true that to every woman her husband is God Eternal and Absolute. I am not asking the question in that sense."

Mother: Yes, he is God Eternal and Absolute to me as my husband, and in a general way as well.

Then I thought that if Sri Ramakrishna were God Eternal, then she, the Holy Mother, must be the Divine Power, the Mother of the Universe. She must be identical with His Divine consort. She and he are like Sita and Rama, Radha and Krishna. I had come to the Holy Mother, cherishing this faith in my heart. I asked her, "If that be the case, then why do I see you preparing bread like an ordinary woman? It is Maya, I suppose, is it not?"

Mother: It is Maya, indeed! Otherwise, why should I fall into such a state? But God loves to sport as a human being. Sri Krishna was born as a cowherd boy and Rama as the child of Dasaratha.

Disciple: Do you ever remember your real nature?

Mother: Yes, I recall it now and then. At that time I say to myself, "What is this that I am doing? What is all this about'?" Then I remember the house, buildings and children (pointing with the palm of her hand to the houses) and forget my real self.

I used to visit the Mother almost daily in her room. She would lie down on her bed and talk to me, with Radhu lying asleep by her side. An oil-lamp would cast a dim light in the room. On some days a maidservant rubbed her feet with medicated oil for rheumatism.

One day she said to me in the course of conversation, "Whenever the thought of a disciple comes to my mind and I yearn to see him, then he either comes here or writes a letter to me. You must have come here prompted by a certain feeling. Perhaps you have in your mind the thought of the Divine Mother of the Universe." Disciple: Are you the Mother of all?

Mother: Yes.

Disciple: Even of these birds and animals?

Mother: Yes, of these also.

Disciple: Then why should they suffer so much?

Mother: In this birth they must have these experiences.

One evening I had the following conversation with the Holy Mother in her room.

Mother: You all have come to me, because you are my own. Disciple: Am I your 'own'?

Mother: Yes, my 'own'. Is there any doubt about it? If a man is the very 'own' of another, they remain inseparably connected in the successive cycles of time.

Disciple: All address you as Apani, but I could not do so. The word Tumi comes spontaneously and naturally.

Mother: That is good, indeed. It denotes an intimate relationship.

In the course of our talk I said to her, "You must have taken the responsibilities of those whom you have initiated with the sacred Mantra. Then why do you say when we request you to fulfil a desire, 'I will speak to the Master about it?' Can't you take our responsibility?" I had as yet not felt the urge to be initiated. Hence this question.

Mother: I have, indeed, taken your responsibility.

Disciple: Please bless me, O Mother, that I may have purity of mind and attachment to God. Mother, I had a classmate in school. I would have been happy if I could bestow upon Sri Ramakrishna a fourth of the love which I cherished for my chum.

Mother,' Ah me! That is true, indeed! Well, I shall speak to the Master about it.

Disciple: Why do you only say that you will speak to the Master? Are you different from him? My desire will certainly be fulfilled by your blessings alone.

Mother: My child, if you can get perfect knowledge through my blessings then I bless you with all my heart and soul. Is it ever possible for a man to free himself unaided, from the clutches of Maya? It was for this that the Master performed spiritual austerities to the utmost extent and gave the results thereof for the redemption of mankind.

Disciple: How can one love Sri Ramakrishna without seeing him?

Mother: Yes, that's true. Can one ever have intimate relationship with a mere airy being!

Disciple: When shall I have the vision of the Master?

Mother: You shall certainly see him. You shall see the Master at the right time.

One day the Mother lay on her bed while Kamini, the maid, was rubbing her knee with some medicated oil for rheumatism. The Mother said to me, "The body is one thing and the soul another. The soul pervades the whole body; therefore I have been feeling the pain in my leg. If I should withdraw my mind from the knee, then I would not feel any pain there."

Referring to initiation by Mantra, I said to her, "Mother, what's the need of taking the Mantra from a teacher? Suppose a man does not repeat his Mantra will it not do for him if he simply repeats, 'Mother Kali, Mother Kali'?"

Mother: The Mantra purifies the body. Man becomes pure by repeating the Mantra of God. Listen to a story. One day Narada went to Vaikuntha to see the Lord and had a long conversation with Him. Narada had not, at that time, been initiated. After Narada left the place, the Lord said to Lakshmi, "Purify the place with cow-dung." "Why, Lord?" asked Lakshmi. "Narada is your great devotee. Why, then, do you say this?" The Lord said, "Narada has not, as yet, received his initiation. The body cannot be pure without initiation."

One should accept the Mantra from a Guru at least for the purification of the body. The Vaishnava, after initiating the disciple, says to him, "Now all depends upon your mind." It is said, "The human teacher utters the Mantra into the ear; but God "breathes the spirit into the soul." Everything depends upon one's mind. Nothing can be achieved without purity of mind. It is said, "The aspirant may have received the grace of the Guru, the Lord and the Vaishnava; but he comes to grief without the grace of 'one'." That 'one' is the mind. The mind of the aspirant should be gracious to him.

Talking of her mother, the Holy Mother said, "My mother used to be highly pleased when anyone of the devotees came to our place. She would exclaim, 'Ah! My grandchild has come!' She would look after them with great attention. She looked upon this family of devotees as her own flesh and blood."

Continuing, the Holy Mother said, "When the Master passed away, I also wanted to leave my body. He appeared before me and said, 'No, you must remain here. There are many things to be done.' I myself realized later on that this was true; I had so many things to do. The Master used to say, ' The people of Calcutta live like worms squirming in darkness. You will guide them.' He said that he would live for three hundred years in a subtle body, in

the hearts of the devotees. He further said that he would have many devotees among white people.

"After the passing away of the Master, I was at first greatly frightened, for I used to put on a Sari with thin red borders and wear gold bangles on my wrist, which made me afraid of people's criticism. I was then at Kamarpukur. Sri Ramakrishna started appearing often before me. Then I gradually got rid of that fear. One day the Master appeared before me and asked me to feed him with Khichuri. I cooked the dish and offered it before Raghuvir in the temple. Then I mentally fed the Master with it.

"Harish was then staying at Kamarpukur for a few days. One day, when I was entering the house after visiting a neighbour, he began to chase me. He was then in a distracted state of mind. He had lost his senses on account of his wife. There was then no one else in the house. I did not know where to go, and ran quickly behind the barn. He would not, however, leave me. I ran and ran round it seven times till I got exhausted. Then my true self came out. I threw him to the ground, pressed my knee on his chest, drew out his tongue and slapped him hard on the cheeks until my fingers became red with slapping. He began to gasp for breath."

The talk turned to Yogen Maharaj (Swami Yogananda).

Mother: None loved me as did my Yogen. Should anyone give him some money, he would keep it aside, saying, "It will be useful for Mother when she goes on pilgrimage." He would be always near me. The other monks would sometimes tease him for staying in this household full of women. He would ask me to address him as Yoga. Before passing away, he said, "Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, and Sri Ramakrishna—they have all come, Mother, to take me."

About herself she said, "Balaram Babu used to refer to me as the 'great ascetic, the embodiment of forbearance.' Can you call him a man, who is devoid of compassion? He is a veritable beast. Sometimes I forget myself in compassion. Then I do not remember who I am."

Finally the Holy Mother said to me, "I feel very free with you. See me in Calcutta and stay with me."

At that time I lived with my people, though I had been cherishing an intense desire to embrace the monastic life. I said to myself, "Perhaps in future it will be possible for me, through her grace, to be a monk and live near her."

When I was in Jayrambati, Radhu's mother, Surabala, was mentally deranged. She had taken to her father's house all the jewellery of her daughter Radhu. Taking advantage of her insane condition, her father snatched away all the jewellery. That made her even more distracted. On her return to Jayrambati, Radhu's mother wept in the temple of Simhavahini, praying for the jewellery. It was dusk. I was talking to the Holy Mother in her room when suddenly, she said to me, "My child, I must go now. That crazy sister-in-law of mine has none else to call her own but me. She is weeping before the Deity for the jewellery." With these words, the Mother left the room. But I could not hear any sound of weeping, nor was it possible to do so at such a distance; yet she had recognized the voice. She returned with Radhu's mother. The latter said to her, "O sister-in-law, you have put away my jewellery. You have deprived me of it." The Mother said, "Had these ornaments belonged to me, then I would have thrown them away at once like the filth of a crow." Referring to Radhu's mother, she said to me, laughing, "Girish used to say that she was my mad companion."

At first I used to hesitate to address the Holy Mother as "Mother." My own mother had died during my childhood. One morning the Holy Mother sent me to a certain person on an errand. As I was about to leave, she asked me, "What will you say to him?" I said, "Why? I shall say to him, 'She asked me to tell you, etc.' ""No, my child," said the Holy Mother, "tell him, 'The Mother asked me to tell you.'" She emphasized the word' Mother'.

One morning I was reading aloud to the Mother and a few devotees on the porch of her room. I was reading a life of Sri Ramakrishna entitled Ramakrishna Punthi written in verse. In the chapter on her marriage with Sri Ramakrishna, the author eulogized her greatly and referred to her as the 'Mother of the Universe.' As I read that passage, the Mother left the porch. A few minutes earlier I had read to her some pages from the Udbodhan, in which had been published a portion of the Kathamrita by M. No one else was present then. I had been reading the following passage:

Girish: I have a desire.

Master: What is it?

Girish: I want love of God for the sake of love.

Master: That kind of love is possible only for the Isvarakotis. Ordinary men cannot achieve it.

I asked the Holy Mother, "What does the Master mean by that?"

Mother: The Isvarakotis have all their desires fulfilled in God (purna-kama). Therefore they have no worldly desires. Love for the sake of divine love is not possible so long as a man has any desire.

Disciple: Mother, do your own brothers belong to the same level as these Isvarakotis?

I thought that as they were her brothers, they must have the same spiritual capacities as the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. At this the Mother simply looked scornfully, as if she were going to say, "What a comparison! What can one achieve by simply being my brother! To be the intimate disciple of the Master is quite a different thing!"

One morning the Holy Mother was assisting in husking paddy. It was almost her daily job. I asked her, "Mother, why should you work so hard?" "My child," said she in reply, "I have done much more than is necessary to make my life a model."

One night, all were asleep in the house of the Holy Mother when the husband of Nalini, a niece of the Holy Mother, arrived unexpectedly with a bullock cart to take Nalini to his house. Nalini had returned from her husband's place and did not want to go back. Hearing of her husband's intention, Nalini shut the door of her room and threatened suicide if her husband forced her to go back with him. The Holy Mother, however, assured her that she would not have to go back with her husband and she opened the room. There was confusion in the family for the whole night and the Holy Mother sat through the night on the porch of Nalini's room. She put out the lamp at dawn and repeated to herself, "Ganga, Gita, Gayatri, Bhagavata, Bhakta, Bhagavan, Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ramakrishna!"

One day the Holy Mother sent me with an old servant of the family to Pagli's (the mad sister-in-law's) father to persuade him either to come to Jayrambati

or to return the ornaments he had taken from his daughter. After a great deal of persuasion, he accompanied us but did not bring the ornaments with him. The Mother begged him to return them and thus free Pagli from her mental agony but the greedy Brahmana turned a deaf ear to her request.

I intended to return home on the day before the Sivaratri, as I wanted to attend Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration at Belur Math, which came off two days after the Sivaratri. I told the Mother about it. She asked me to go to Kamarpukur first. I had left home with a great yearning to see the Holy Mother alone, and in my eagerness I had forgotten to take my umbrella or an extra piece of cloth. At the request of the Mother, I agreed to visit the birthplace of the Master. She gave me a fresh piece of cloth to put on, and asked me to take it with me.

Mother: Have you any money with you? You will require carriage hire. Take the money from me.

Disciple: I have money with me. I have not to take it from you.

Mother: Write to me after you reach home. Ah, I could not feed my son properly. I could not prepare anything good for him. This was because this time there was great confusion in the family on account of Nalini and Pagli.

I prostrated myself before her and set out with tears in my eyes. The Holy Mother accompanied us for some distance and then watched us till we were out of sight. I could not refrain from weeping out of devotion for her, till I had reached Kamarpukur.

After my arrival at Kamarpukur, I was shown the room where the Holy Mother had lived. There I saw a picture of the Mother, which made me still more restless to see her again. Next day M. and Prabodh Babu went to Jayrambati via Kamarpukur, halting at the latter place for a few hours. In the evening, Lalit Babu, a disciple of the Mother, arrived there, dressed in turban, trousers and long toga. He was on his way to Jayrambati. As it would be difficult for me to go from Kamarpukur to Calcutta alone, some devotee suggested that I might revisit Jayrambati and go to Calcutta in the company of Lalit Babu. So I went with him to Jayrambati once again, and said to the Mother, "I am here again." The Mother was greatly pleased and said, "That's very good. You can go to Calcutta with Lalit."

After the Sivaratri festival was over, the devotees sat down for their meal. They were served some Prasada on leaf-plates. J asked them what it was. They said that it was the Prasada of the Holy Mother. I also partook of it. Later on, I said to the Mother, "They all enjoyed your Prasada. But you never offered it to me." "My child," said the Mother, "you never asked for it. How could I suggest it?" What great humility!

The next day, Lalit Babu was sent in a palanquin to get Radhu's ornaments from her grandfather. Lalit posed as a Government official and carried a letter with him supposed to have been written by a high police officer of Calcutta. The Holy Mother asked M. to accompany Lalit Babu lest the latter, a young man, should use insulting language when speaking to the old Brahmana. However, he succeeded in bringing Radhu's grandfather with the ornaments to Jayrambati in the afternoon. At about two o'clock in the morning, we heard that the Mother was spending a sleepless night. She was feeling nervous. M. and I entered the inner apartments. While all were looking for medicines, I asked Mother the cause of her ailment. She said, "After they had left to fetch the ornaments, I felt worried and feared that they might insult the old Brahmana. That made me nervous." I was amazed to see the compassion of the Mother for the Brahmana who was at the root of all these troubles.

The next afternoon I left with the party for Calcutta. The Mother had told Lalit Babu about me, "He is very devoted to God. Please take him with you." We all prostrated ourselves before the Mother. Her eyes became filled with tears. She was moved to tears as she accompanied us to the outer gate of the house. At Vishnupur, on our way to Calcutta, M., Prabodh Babu and others visited the shrine of Mrinmayi, an aspect of the Divine Mother. But Lalit Babu and I directly went to the Railway Station and boarded the train. M. sent Prabodh Babu to request us also to visit the shrine, but we did not care to see Mrinmayi (lit. made of earth) as we had seen Chinmayi (a living Goddess). I arrived at the Belur Math and after witnessing Sri Ramakrishna's birthday festival, returned home.

UDBODHAN OFFICE, CALCUTTA Year 1907

Next winter I came to Calcutta to pay my respects to the Holy Mother. On the first day I went to see her, she was still staying at the house of Balaram Base, but by the time of my second visit, she had shifted to her newly constructed house in Calcutta (i.e., the Udbodhan Office). On entering the

house, I saw Doctor Kanjilal reading a newspaper. In answer to my query he said, "The Mother had an attack of pox. She has not yet completely recovered. You may see her after two weeks." I had not been aware of her illness. Swami Saradananda said to me, "Come tomorrow, you may see her then. Also take your meal here." When I went the next day, the Mother showed me the pox marks. Most of them had disappeared. Through her blessings and the arrangement made by Swami Saradananda, I was, staying at the Belur Math. On being informed of this, the Holy Mother remarked, "That's good. He has fallen victim to the influence of monastic life. Live in the Belur Math. May you get love for the Master! You have my blessings. "

I used to take milk for the Mother now and then from the Belur Math. That would also give me the opportunity to pay my respects to her. One day, while entering her house with milk, I saw her preparing betel-rolls assisted by Nalini, her niece. Seeing me, Nalini was about to leave the room. The Mother checked her and said. "Don't go away. He is my child. Sit here." In the course of conversation, she referred to the relatives of Maku's husband (Maku was another niece), and said, "I have to take special care of them, otherwise they feel offended. But you are my children. You are satisfied with whatever I do for you. You do not mind if I cannot always show you attention. But those relatives feel very much offended if I do not give them the best of everything, or if I fail in the least in attending to them." After a while I asked her, "Mother, how does one get purity of mind and yearning for God?"

Mother: Oh! You will certainly have these. As you have taken refuge in the Master, you will achieve all. Pray to him sincerely.

Disciple: I can't do it. Please do pray for me.

Mother: I always pray to Sri Ramakrishna to make your mind pure and holy.

Disciple: Yes, Mother, I shall have everything if you but pray for me. .

After a few months I was sent to Ghatal, not very far from Jayrambati, to give relief to the flood-stricken people of that place. I took leave for three days and visited the Holy Mother at Jayrambati on the occasion of the Jagaddhatri Puja. Atul was with me. This was his first visit to the Mother. We went to Jayrambati via Kamarpukur and as soon as we reached her house, Ashu Maharaj, an attendant of the Holy Mother, said, "It is nice that

you have come. The Mother has been sad because of not seeing any devotee for some time past." The Mother asked us to stay for meal and fed us sumptuously. Early next morning we had to return to the relief work. While taking leave of the Mother, I said to her, "I shall come again." Atul said, like a school-boy, "Please remember."

JAYRAMBATI

16th December 1909

After finishing the relief work at Ghatal, I again returned to Jayrambati. On reaching the house of the Holy Mother in the evening, I found her seated on the porch applying medicine to her leg. She was suffering from rheumatic pain in her knees.

Disciple: What is this medicine?

Mother: Someone suggested this leaf. Have you been starving the whole day?

Disciple: No, but I have not taken any food on the way.

Mother: Why did you not buy some refreshments? There are stores on the way.

I had with me only a rupee which I had saved for my return journey to Belur Math. However, I did not tell her about it. She served me with a hot meal which I ate heartily. The Mother said to me, "The Master will get a great deal of his work done through you. You went to Ghatal, distributed so many things and a great number of people were benefited. When the work is over, at the right time, the Master will gather his child back to his bosom. "

Disciple: Mother, why do I not see him?

Mother: You will see him, son, you will see him at the right time. Lalit (a disciple of the Mother) would never ask: 'Why do I not see him?' He firmly believed that since the Master was his very own, sooner or later, he was certain to see him.

Disciple: Mother, please look after my welfare. Please bless me that I may develop pure devotion.

Mother: Yes, dear child, you will be endowed with pure devotion.

She gave me a blanket and asked me to use it during the night. I asked her, "Whose is this blanket?" She said, "It is mine. I use it myself."

18th December 1909

Mother was preparing betel-rolls in the verandah of her room. It was nearly 9 a.m. I was eating puffed rice. I said to her, "Mother please do not detain me this time for long."

Mother: If you don't want to stay, you can come with me. When the time comes (i.e. death), all have to go.

Disciple: Please remember your promise, Mother.

Mother: I have already said, I will come and carry you along with me.

Disciple: Please take me with you this time. Next time I will accompany the Master when he comes.

Mother laughed and said, "Well, I am not coming again!"

Disciple: Whether you decide to come or not, I will certainly come back to this world. I have a desire to come.

Mother: Most probably, you wouldn't want to return when the time comes. What is there in this world, my child? Tell me at least one thing that is worth-while! That is why Sri Ramakrishna was satisfied with the most ordinary dishes. Whenever I would offer him Sandesh (a kind of sweetmeat), he would say, "What is so special in it? It is just the same as a lump of clay."

Disciple: Why do you cite the example Sri Ramakrishna? He is beyond all comparison.

Mother: Exactly so. Will there ever be anyone really like him?

At this point, Uncle Varada came to read the letters to her. One of the letters was from my brother, requesting the Mother to persuade me to return home. Though short, the letter was written in a good style and contained beautiful sentiments. The Mother said, "Ah! What a nice letter!" Then she said, addressing me, "Why don't you return home? Live in the world, earn money and being up a family." She was testing me. "But, Mother," said I, "please do not say that."

Mother: So many people are leading worldly lives. If you do not feel inclined, you need not do it.

I began to weep. The Mother then said to me with great tenderness, "My child, please do not weep. You are a living God. Who is able to renounce all for His sake? Even the injunctions of Destiny are cancelled if one takes refuge in God. Destiny strikes off with her own hand what she has written about such a person. What does a man become by realizing God? Does he get two horns? No. What happens is, he develops discrimination between the real and the unreal, gets spiritual illumination and goes beyond life and death. God is realized in spirit. How else can one see God? Has God talked to anybody devoid of ecstatic fervour? One sees God in spiritual vision, talks to Him, and establishes relationship with Him in Spirit."

Disciple: No, Mother. There is something else besides. One gets a direct vision of the Atman.

Mother: That Naren (Swami Vivekananda) alone had. The Master kept with himself the key to Naren's liberation. What else is spiritual life besides praying to the Master, repeating his Name, and contemplating on him? (With a smile) And the Master? What is there after all in him? He is our own eternally!

Disciple: Mother, please See that I realize the right thing -- Just that Sri Ramakrishna is our own!

Mother: Must I repeat it? (Firmly) You will certainly realize it. Certainly.

* * * *

19th December 1909

I was talking to the Mother in her room. She was lying on her bed. The conversation drifted to the Vedanta. I said to her, "Nothing exists in the world except name and form. It cannot be proved that matter exists. Therefore the conclusion is that God and such other things do not exist."

My idea was that such things as the Master and the Holy Mother were also illusory. She at once understood my thought and said, "Narendra once said to me, 'Mother, the knowledge that disregards the lotus feet of the Guru is nothing but ignorance. What is the validity of knowledge if it proves that the Guru is naught? Give up this dry discussion, this hodgepodge of philosophy: Who has been able to know God by reasoning? Even Siva and sages like Suka and Vyasa are like big ants at the most."

Disciple: I want to Know. I understand a little too. How can one stop reasoning?

Mother: Reasoning does not disappear as long as one has not attained to perfect knowledge.

I asked her about Japa and other spiritual practices. The Mother said, "Through these spiritual disciplines the ties of past Karma are cut asunder. But realization of God cannot be achieved without ecstatic love (Prema Bhakti) for Him. Do you know the significance of Japa and other spiritual practices? By these, the dominance of the sense organs is subdued."

Referring to Lalit Chatterjee who had been dangerously ill, the Mother said, "Lalit used to give me great financial help. He would take me out in his carriage. He gives much for the Divine service in the shrines at Dakshineswar and Kamarpukur. My Lalit has a heart worth a million rupees! There are many who are miserly in spite of their wealth. The rich should serve God and His devotees with money, and the poor worship God by repeating His Name."

Referring to ecstatic love, the Mother said, "Did the cowherd boys of Brindavan get Sri Krishna as their "own" through Japa or meditation? They realized Him through ecstatic love. They used to say to Him, as to an intimate friend, 'Come here, O Krishna! Eat this! Take this!' "

Disciple: How can one yearn for God without seeing the manifestation of His love?

Mother: Yes, it is possible. There lies the grace of God."

Part 2: Conversations (Recorded by Swami Arupananda)

JAYRAMBATI
31st December 1909

It was about nine in the morning. The Holy Mother had been preparing betel-rolls when I came to see her. Soon we were engaged in conversation.

Disciple: Mother, I have seen and heard so much; still I cannot recognize you as my 'own mother'.

Mother: If you do not think of me as your 'own', how is it that you come here so often? You will know your 'own mother' in proper time.

After a while I said to her, referring to my parents and brothers, "My parents brought me up. I do not know where they are now (after their death), or how they live. Please give your blessings that my brothers may have good tendencies."

Mother: Do most people ever want God? There are so many people in this very family; but do all want the Lord?

After a few minutes she said to me, "Don't marry. Don't enter worldly life. What should you fear if you are a celibate? Wherever you may live, you will be free."

Disciple: But, Mother, I have fear.

Mother: No, have no fear. All depends upon the will of the Master.

Disciple: The mind is the whole thing. If it be in a pure state, it does not matter where I live. Please see, Mother, that my mind always remains pure.

Mother: May it be so!

2nd January 1910

It was the birthday of the Holy Mother. A few days before, Prabodh Babu had come to Jayrambati and given five rupees to the brothers of the Holy Mother for special worship on her birthday. The Mother said to them, "You

need not do anything special today. I shall wear a new cloth; the Master will be worshipped with a sweet offering and I shall partake of it later on. That is all for this occasion."

After the worship in the shrine, the Holy Mother sat on her couch with her feet hanging down. She had put on a new piece of cloth. Prabodh Babu offered some flowers at her feet. I stood on the porch near the door. The Mother said to me, "What! Won't you offer some flowers? Here they are. Take them." Then I also offered flowers at her feet. We enjoyed a sumptuous feast at midday and afterwards Prabodh Babu left for Calcutta; but as I was indisposed, I remained at Jayrambati.

5th January 1910

In the course of a conversation the Mother said, "Can you tell me if anyone could bind God? Mother Yasoda could and also the cowherd boys and milkmaids of Brindavan could, because He Himself allowed them to do so.

"As long as a man has desires, there is no end to his transmigration. It is the desires alone that make him take one body after another. There will be rebirth for a man if he has even the desire to eat a piece of sweetmeat. It is for this reason that a variety of foodstuffs are brought to Belur Math. Desire maybe compared to a minute seed. It is like a big banyan tree growing out of a seed, which is no bigger than a dot. Rebirth is inevitable so long as one has desires. It is like taking the soul from one pillowcase and putting it into another; only one or two out of many men can be found who are free from all desires. Though one gets a new body on account of desires, yet one does not completely lose spiritual consciousness if one has to one's credit merits from previous births.

"A priest in the temple of Govinda in Brindavan used to feed his mistress with the food-offerings of the Deity. As a result of this sin, he got the body of a ghoul after his death. But he had served God in the temple. As a result of this merit, he one day appeared before all in his own physical body. It was possible for him to do so on account of his past good actions. He told people the cause of his inferior birth and said to them further, 'Please arrange a religious festival and music for the redemption of my soul from this state. That will free me.' "

Disciple: Is it possible to be freed from such states through religious festivals and music?

Mother: Yes; that is enough for the Vaishnavas. They do not perform such obsequies as Sraddha and so forth.

Once I visited the image of Jagannath at Puri at the time of the Car Festival. I wept in sheer joy to see so many people having a view of the image of the Deity. 'Ah,' I said to myself, 'it is good. They will all be saved.' But later on I realized that it was not so. Only one or two who were absolutely free from desires could attain liberation. When I narrated the incident to Yogin-Ma, she corroborated this by saying, 'Yes, Mother, only people who are free from desires attain liberation (Mukti).'

* * * *

One morning, while taking my breakfast on the verandah of the Holy Mother's room, I asked her, "Mother, will I have to be initiated into Sannyasa if I am to live in Belur Math?"

Mother: Yes, my child.

Disciple: But, Mother, the monastic life begets a terrible vanity.

Mother: Yes, that is true. A monk may become very vain. He may think, 'See, he does not respect me. He does not bow down before me, and so on.' (Pointing to her own white cloth) (should rather live thus (meaning possessed of inner renunciation. Gaur Siromani took to the monastic life in his old age when his sense-organs had become dull. Is it possible, my child, to get of vanity—vanity of beauty, vanity of virtue, vanity of knowledge and vanity of a holy life?

The Holy Mother exhorted me to make ready for the life of renunciation. "Go home," said she, "and tell your brothers once and for all, 'I will not accept any job; I need not be a slave anyone, now that my mother is no more. I will not do anything of that sort. You be happy with your householder's duties.' "

The Mother and I were engaged in conversation in the evening.

Disciple: Mother, one gets spiritual realization at any time the grace of God descends on him. Then he does not have to wait for the right time.

Mother: That is true; but can the mango which ripens out of season be as sweet as the one which ripens in the month of Jaishtha that is, the proper season? Men are trying to get fruits out season. You see, nowadays one gets mangoes and jackfruits even in the month of Asvin (autumn). But these are not as sweet those found in the proper season. This is also true of the efforts that lead to God-realization. Perhaps you practise some Japa and austerities in this life; in the next life you may intensify the spiritual mood and in the following life you advance further.

Referring to one's attaining spiritual realisation suddenly, the Mother said, "God has the nature of the child. One man does not ask for it, yet He gives it to him, whereas another man asks for it and God will not give it to him. It is all His whim."

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Another day while the Holy Mother was seated on her porch preparing betel-rolls, I said to her, "In future, how many will practise spiritual disciplines to propitiate you!" Mother said with a smile, "What do you say! All will say, 'Ah, the Mother had such a gout, she used to limp like this!' "

Disciple: You may say that.

Mother: That's good. That is why the Master used to say when he was lying ill at the Cossipore garden, "Those who came to me expecting some earthly gain have disappeared, saying, 'Ah, he is an Incarnation of God! How can he be ill? This is all Maya.' But those who are my ‘own’ have been suffering a great deal in seeing this misery.’

UDBODHAN OFFICE, CALCUTTA

On the day previous to my initiation I said to the Holy Mother, "Mother, I want to be initiated." Mother said, "Have you not been initiated yet?" I answered in the negative. "I thought that you had been initiated," she said. After initiating me, she blessed me, saying "May your body and mind become pure by repeating the name of God!"

Disciple: What is the need of repeating the Mantra with the fingers? Is it not enough to do so mentally?

Mother: God has given the fingers that they may be blessed by repeating His Name with them.

25th September 1910

The Mother was engaged in a conversation with me in the morning.

Disciple: Mother, if there exists some being called God, why is there so much suffering and misery in the world? Does He not see it? Has He not the power to remove it?

Mother: The creation itself is full of misery and happiness. Could anyone appreciate happiness if misery did not exist? Besides, how is it possible for all persons to be happy? Sita once said to Rama, "Why don't you remove the suffering and unhappiness of all your subjects? Please make all the inhabitants of your kingdom happy. If you only will, you can easily do it." Rama said, "Is it ever possible for all persons to be happy at the same time?" "Why not?" asked Sita, "Please supply from the royal treasury the means of satisfying everyone's wants." "All right," said Rama, "Your will shall be carried out." Rama sent for Lakshmana and said to him, "Go and notify everyone in my empire that whatever he wants he may get from the royal treasury." At this the subjects of Rama came to the palace and told their wants. The royal treasury began to flow without stint. When everyone was spending his days joyously, through the Maya of Rama the roof of the building in which Rama and Sita lived, started to leak. Workmen were sent for to repair the building. But where were workmen to be had? There was not a labourer in the kingdom. In dire absence of masons, carpenters and artisans all buildings went out of repair, and work was at a standstill. The subjects of Rama informed the king of their difficulties. Finding no other help, Sita said to Rama. "It is no longer possible to bear the discomfort of the leaking roof. Please arrange things as they were before. Then all will be able to procure workmen. Now I realize that it is not possible for all persons to be happy at the same time." "Let it be so," said Rama'. Instantaneously all things were as before and workmen could once more be engaged. Sita said to Rama, "Lord, this creation is your wonderful sport!"

No one will suffer for all time. No one will spend all his days on this earth in suffering. Every action brings its own result and one gets one's opportunities accordingly.

Disciple: Is everything then due to Karma?

Mother: If not, to what else? Don't you see the scavenger carrying the tub on his head?

Disciple: Whence does one first get the propensity, which leads him to an action, good or bad? You may say, as an explanation of the propensities of this life, that they are due to the actions of the previous life, and the propensities of that life to the preceding one. But where is the beginning?

Mother: Nothing can happen without the will of God. Not even a blade of grass can move. When a man passes into a favourable time, he gets the desire to contemplate on God. But when the time is unfavourable, he gets all the facilities for doing evil actions. Everything happens in time according to the will of God. It is God alone who expresses His will through the actions of man. Could Naren (Swami Vivekananda) by himself have accomplished all those things?' He was able to succeed because God worked through him. The Master has predetermined what he is going to accomplish. If anyone surrenders himself totally at his feet, then the Master will see that everything is set right. One must bear with everything, because everything is determined by actions (Karmas). Again, our present actions can counteract the effect of past actions.

Disciple: Can action ever cancel action?

Mother: Why not? If you do a good action, that will counter act your past evil action. Past sins can be counteracted by meditation , Japa and spiritual thought.

I had heard that a boy in the Mirzapur Street was possessed by a ghost. Some members of the Udbodhan Office had visited the boy yesterday. I asked the Mother, "How long does one live in the spirit body'!"

Mother: All people, excepting highly evolved souls, live in the spirit body for a year. After that, food and water are offered in Gaya for the satisfaction of the departed souls and religious festivals are arranged. By these means the

souls of the departed are released from their spirit body. They go to other planes of existence and experience pleasure or pain, and in course of time, are born again in human forms according to their desires. Others attain salvation from those planes. But if a person has some meritorious action to his credit in this life, he does not lose spiritual consciousness altogether in his spirit body.

Here the Mother referred to the spirit of the Vaishnava priest of the Govindaji temple in Brindavan.

Disciple: Is it possible for one to attain to a higher state if one's Sraddha ceremony is performed in Gaya?

Mother: Yes, that is true.

Disciple: Then what is the necessity of spiritual practices?

Mother: These dead souls, no doubt, attain to a higher state and live there for some time, but afterwards they are again born in this world according to their past desires. After their birth in a human body some of them obtain salvation in this life, whereas others take inferior births to reap the results of their Karma. This world is moving around like a wheel. That indeed is the last birth in which one gets rid of all desires completely.

Disciple: You just referred to the dead souls attaining to a divine state. Do they go there by themselves or does someone lead them?

Mother: No, they go by themselves. The subtle body is like a body made of air.

Disciple: What happens to those for whom no Sraddha ceremony is performed in Gaya?

Mother: They live in the spirit body until some fortunate ones born in their family perform the Sraddha ceremony in Gaya or some other forms of obsequies.

Disciple: We hear of ghosts and spooks. Are they the attendants of Siva or simply spirits? Or are they the spirits of dead people?

Mother: They are the spirits of the dead. The spirit attendants of Siva belong to a special group. One must live very carefully. Every action produces its results. It is not good to harass others or use harsh words towards others.

Disciple: Mother, a margosa tree does not produce a mango, nor does a mango tree produce a margosa fruit. Everyone reaps the result of his own Karma.

Mother: You are right, my child. In course of time one does not feel even the existence of God. After attaining wisdom (Jnana) one sees that gods and deities are all Maya. Everything comes into existence in time and also disappears in time.

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UDBODHAN (PRAYER-HALL)

It was morning and we were talking with the Holy Mother.

Mother: After Sri Ramakrishna passed away, while staying alone at Kamarpukur", I thought within myself, "I have no children. There is no one in this world whom I can call my own. What will happen to me?" Then the Master appeared to me and said, "Well, you want a son. I have given you so many jewels of sons. And in course of time you will hear many many more people addressing you as Mother."

While I was going to Brindavan, I saw the Master look at me through the window of the railway carriage and say, "You have the gold amulet with you. See that you do not lose it."

I had tied his amulet on my arm. I used to worship it. Later I gave it to the Belur Math. They worship it there.

Devotee: That amulet, it seems, was lost this year on the Master's Tithi Puja day. Along with flowers and Bel leaves, that also was thrown into the Ganges, unknowingly. When water receded at the ebb tide, Ram Babu's son found it while playing there and brought it back.

Mother: It is his amulet. It must be preserved carefully. The talk turned to Belur Math.

Mother: Of a truth, I always saw as though the Master lived on the land on the other side of the Ganga (that is, opposite to Dakshineswar)-in a cottage just where the present monastery and plantain trees are. (At the time there was no Math). After the new land was purchased for the Math, Naren took me there one day. He showed me each and every part of it and said, "Mother, now you can move about in your own place at will without any restraint."

At Bodh Gaya I saw the Math of that place with so much of property. There was no dearth of any commodity there. I used to weep and pray to the Master: 'Oh, Master, my children have no place to stay, nothing to eat. They go wandering from door to door. If only they could have a place like this to stay!' And so by the grace of the Master this Math came up.

One day Naren came and said, "Mother, just now I offered one hundred and eight Bel leaves to the Master, so that we could have a piece of land for the Math. That Karma can never go without its fruit. One day it will certainly happen that way."

At night after food I went to bring the betel-rolls and heard these words from the Holy Mother: "Naren said, 'Mother, now-a-days everything of mine is flying away. I see that every thing flies away.'" The Mother smilingly continued, "I said, 'Please take care. Don't send me also flying.' At that Naren answered, 'Mother, if I were to send you flying, where shall I remain? That Jnana which makes nothing of the lotus feet of the Guru is surely Ajnana. If the Guru's lotus feet are slighted, where is the basis for Jnana?' "

Having said this, she continued, "After knowledge dawns, God and all else vanish into nothing. Mother, Mother — in the end my Mother pervades the whole universe. Everything becomes One. This is the simple truth."

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UOBOOHAN (PRAYER-HALL)

The Holy Mother was sorting Bel leaves for the daily worship, when I showed her one of the photographs of her that had been printed recently. I asked if it was a good likeness of hers.

Mother: Yes, this is a good picture, but I was stouter before it was taken. Yogen (Swami Yogananda) was very ill at that time. Worrying about him, I became emaciated. I was very unhappy then. I would weep when Yogen's illness took a turn for the worse and I would feel happy when he felt better. Mrs. Sarah Bull took this photograph. At first I did not agree to it; but she insisted and said, "Mother, I shall take this picture to America and worship it." At last the picture was taken.

Disciple: Mother, that photograph of Sri Ramakrishna which you have with you is a very good one. One feels it when one sees the picture. Well, is that a good likeness of the Master?

Mother: Yes, that picture is very, very good. It originally belonged to a Brahmana cook. Several prints were made of his first photograph. The Brahmana took one of them. The picture was at first very dark, just like the image of Kali. Therefore it was given to the Brahmana. When he left Dakshineswar for some place—I do not remember where—he gave it to me. I kept the photograph with the pictures of other gods and goddesses and worshipped it. At that time I lived on the ground floor of the Nahabat. One day the Master came there and at the sight of the picture he said, "Hallo, what is all this?" Lakshmi and I had been cooking under the staircase. Then I saw the Master take in his hand the Bel leaves and flowers kept there for worship, and offer them to the photograph. He worshipped the picture. This is the same picture. That Brahmana never returned; so the picture remained with me.

Disciple: Mother, did you ever see the face of the Master to be pale at the time of his Samadhi?

Mother: Why, I don't remember to have seen it so. On the other hand, I always saw a smile on his face in his ecstatic mood.

Disciple: It is possible to have a smile during the state of emotional ecstasy (Bhava Samadhi); but regarding the photograph of his sitting posture, the Master had said that it was a picture of a very exalted state. Is it possible to have a smile in that state?

Mother: But I have seen him smile in all states of Samadhi.

Disciple: Of what complexion was he?

Mother: His complexion was like the colour of gold-like that of Harital (yellow orpiment). His complexion blended with the colour of the golden amulet, which he wore on his arm. When I used to rub him with oil, I could clearly see a lustre coming out of his entire body. A youth with a very fair complexion once came to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. The Master said to me, "Both of us (the man and the Master) will walk side by side in the Panchavati. You judge who is the fairer of the two." They started walking and I observed that the youth was slightly fairer than the Master. He was 19 or 20 years old.

When the Master would come out of his room in the temple, people used to stand in line and say to one another, "Ah, there he goes!" He was fairly stout. Mathur Babu gave him a low stool to sit on. It was a rather wide stool, but it was not quite big enough to hold him comfortably when he would squat on it to take his meals. People would look at him wonder-struck when he went with slow, steady steps to the Ganges to take his bath.

When he was at Kamarpukur, the men and women there looked at him with mouths agape whenever he chanced to come out of the house. One day as he went out for a walk in the direction of the canal known as 'Bhutir Khal', the women who had gone there to fetch water looked at him agape and said, "There the Master goes!" Annoyed at this, Sri Ramakrishna said to Hriday, "Well, Hridu, please put a veil on my head at once."

I never saw the Master sad. He was joyous in the company of everyone, were he a boy of five or a man of ripe old age. I never saw him morose, my child. Ah, what happy days those were! At Kamarpukur he would get up early in the morning and tell me, "Today I shall eat this particular green, please cook it for me." With the other women of the family I would accordingly arrange for his meal. After a few days he said, "What has come over me? The moment I get up from sleep I say, ' What shall I eat? What shall I eat?'" Then he said to me, "I have no desire for any particular food. I shall eat whatever you will cook for me."

He used to go to Kamarpukur to get relief from the severe diarrhoea from which he was suffering at Dakshineswar. He used to say, "Goodness, my belly is filled only with filth. There is no end to it!" Suffering thus, he developed a kind of hatred for the body and thereafter he did not pay much heed to it.

Once, in Kamarpukur, the Master came across a big fish, which had come on the road from the nearby overflowing tank. He helped it back into the tank, saying, "Run, run for your life! If Hridu sees you, he will finish you off in no time." Returning home, he told Hriday, "O Hridu! Today I saw a very big fish of yellow hue, that had come on the road. I helped it back into the tank." "O Uncle! What have you done!" cried Hriday, "Alas! A big fish like that would have made a delicious dish!"

Nowadays you see so many devotees everywhere. There is so much excitement and noise. But during the illness of the Master one of the devotees ran away in order to avoid giving twenty rupees! The expenses for the treatment of the Master during his illness were raised by subscription, and this devotee had been asked to contribute that sum. Now it is not at all difficult to serve the Master. For though food is offered to him, it is really eaten by the devotees. If you make the Master sit, he will sit. If you make him lie down, he will remain in that position. After all, he is only a picture!

The Master saw (in a vision) Balaram Babu with a turban on his head and his hands folded, standing by the image of Kali. Balaram always remained with folded hands before the Master. He never saluted the Master by touching his feet. The Master understood his thought and would say to him, "O Balaram, my foot is itching. Kindly massage it gently." Immediately Balaram would send for Naren or Rakhal or someone else among the boys who attended on the Master, and ask him to massage his feet!

Disciple: Once I asked Swami Brahmananda about Sri Ramakrishna's complexion. He said, "The Master's complexion was just like ours."

Mother: Yes, he looked like that when Rakhal and other disciples met him. At that time he had lost his former good health and complexion. . For example, look at me and see my complexion and health. Did I look like this formerly? No, I was very pretty then. I was not stout, but later on I became so.

In Dakshineswar I lived very quietly and unobserved by people in general. The manager of the temple used to say, 'We have heard that she lives here, but we have never seen her.' At that time I would see the Master perhaps once in two months. I used to console my mind by saying, 'O mind, are you so fortunate that you can see him everyday?' I used to stand behind the

screen round the verandah of the Nahabat, and hear the Master sing and see him dance in ecstasy through the holes in the screen. It was standing there long that brought on the rheumatism in my legs. He would tell me, 'A wild bird, if kept within a cage day and night, gets rheumatic. So you should have a walk at times in the neighbourhood.'

I would bathe at 4 a.m. As the day advanced, a little sunshine would come near the staircase, and I would dry my hair then. I had very long hair in those days. A small room, after all, in the Nahabat! And that too used to be full of things. Many things were even stored in stringed suspenders from the ceiling. But I never experienced any difficulty.

It was the time of worship. The Mother made herself ready to go to the shrine room. I came downstairs. After the worship was over, I went upstairs again to bring the Prasada for the devotees. As I took the leaves containing the sweets and fruits, suddenly my elbow touched the Holy Mother's feet. "Ah!" said the Mother, and saluted me with folded hands. "That's nothing," said I. But she was not satisfied with merely bowing down before me and said, "Come, my child, let me kiss you." She touched my chin with her hand and kissed the hand and so became pacified. Thus she used to respect her disciples as the manifestations of God and at the same time show her affection to them as a mother does to her children.

UDBODHAN (PRAYER-HALL) 29th October 1910

It was early in the morning. I was seated near the Mother's bed. She began to talk to me about the Master.

Mother: On the very day I reached Puri, I quickly finished the worship of the Master in the morning by placing his picture on a tin containing ghee. Then I went to visit the temple of Sri Jagannath after locking the room. When I returned, I saw the picture of the Master at the foot of the tin. The others too came and observed it. All felt that some thief might have entered the house in our absence. But all the things in the room remained undisturbed. At last I noticed that big red ants had gathered on the tin—it was a ghee tin, you see. Since they had approached the picture of the Master also, he had comedown and settled himself below!

Disciple: Does the Master really live in the picture?

Mother: Of course, he does. The body and the shadow are the same. And what is his picture but a shadow?

Disciple: Does he live in all the pictures?

Mother: Yes. If you pray to him constantly before his picture then he manifests himself through that picture. The place where the picture is kept becomes a shrine. Suppose a man worships the Master there (pointing to a plot of land north of the Udbodhan), then the place is associated with his presence.

Disciple: Well, good and bad memories are associated with all places.

Mother: It is not exactly like that. The Master will pay special attention to such a place.

Disciple: Does the Master really partake of the food that you offer him?

Mother: Yes, he does.

Disciple: But we do not see any sign of it.

Mother: A light comes out of his eyes and licks all the articles of food. His ambrosial touch replenishes them again, so there is no decrease.

The Lord comes down from Vaikuntha (the heavenly abode of Sri Vishnu) to where the devotee calls him. On the night of the Kojagari Purnima, Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth) comes down to the earth from Vaikuntha. She visits and accepts the worship in those places where she wants to bestow her special grace. My mother-in-law had seen at Kamarpukur a fair girl, about 14 or 15 years old, with ear-rings made of conch-shells, and with diamond bangles on the arm. The goddess Lakshmi Herself, who had come in the form of the girl, spoke to her under the Bakul tree (opposite the house of the Master). My mother-in-law asked, "Who are you, dear?" Sri Lakshmi replied, "Oh! I have specially come here!" My mother-in-law asked, "Have you seen my son (Ramkumar, the elder brother of Sri Ramakrishna)? He has gone to perform worship. It is already so late, and he has not returned yet." "Yes, he is on his way back," said Lakshmi, "From that place itself, I have now come to visit your house." "No, dear," said my mother-in-law, "there is nobody at home. Please do not come now." Hearing such repeated refusals

to entertain her, the goddess disappeared saying, "All right. Anyway, I will look after you all in a general way." So, you see, their circumstances never improved to a great extent. However, they could maintain themselves on coarse food and clothing.

My mother-in-law had seen the girl come from the direction of the house of the Lahas, where the corn used to be stored. On his return, when my brother-in-law heard of all this, he exclaimed, "0 Mother, you did not understand! Today is Kojagari Purnima. Lakshmi Herself had come!" He could foretell things, and verified this incident by astrological calculations.

Why? Does the Master require any food? He doesn't. He eats the food-offering only for the gratification of the devotees. The sacred Prasada purifies the heart. The mind becomes impure, if one eats food without first offering it to God.

Disciple: Does the Master really partake of the food-offering?

Mother: Yes, do I not notice whether he partakes of the food or not? The Master takes the seat before the plate and then partakes of the food.

Disciple: Do you then actually see it?

Mother: Yes. In the case of some offerings, he actually eats and in other cases he merely looks at them. Take your own case. You don't like to eat all things at all times. Nor do you relish the food offered by anyone and everyone. It is like that. One's love of God depends entirely upon one's inner feeling. Love of God is the essential thing.

Disciple: How does one get love of God? Even if one's own son be brought up by someone else, he does not recognize his own mother as his mother.

Mother: Yes, that is true. The grace of God is the thing that is needed. One should be fit to deserve the grace of God.

Disciple: How can one speak of deserving grace, or not deserving it? Grace is the same for all.

Mother: One must pray sitting on the bank of the river. He will be taken across in proper time.

Disciple: Everything happens when the proper time comes. Then where does God's grace come in?

Mother: Must you not sit with the fishing rod in your hand, if you want to catch the fish?

Disciple: If God be our 'own', why then should one sit and wait?

Mother: That is true. It may happen even out of season. Don't you see now-a-days how people get fruits like mango and jack out of season? How many mangoes grow nowadays in: the month of Bhadra?

Disciple: Is it all, that He sends us away by giving us what we deserve? Or, can one get Him as one's very own? Is God my very 'own'?

Mother: Yes, God is one's very 'own'. It is the eternal relationship. He is everyone's 'own'. One realizes Him in proportion to the intensity of one's feeling for Him.

Disciple: Intense feeling is like a dream. A man dreams what he thinks.

Mother: Yes, it is a dream. The whole world is a dream; even this (the waking state) is a dream.

Disciple: No, this is not a dream, for then it would have disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. This state exists for many, many births.

Mother: Let it be so; still it is nothing but dream. What you dreamt 'last night does not exist now. (As a matter of fact, on the previous night the disciple had an amazing dream). A farmer who lost a son dreamt at night that he was a king and the father of eight sons. When the dream vanished, he said to his wife, "Shall I weep for my eight children or for this one?"

After arguing thus with the Mother, I said, "Mother, I. don't really bother my head about what I just said to you. All that I want to know is whether there is anyone whom I may call my 'own'."

Mother: Yes, such a One exists.

Disciple: Surely?

Mother: Yes.

Disciple: If He be really our 'own', then why should we pray unto Him in order to see Him? One who is truly my 'own' would come to me even if I did not call on Him. Does God do things for us as our parents do?

Mother: Yes, that is true, my child. He Himself has become our father and mother. He Himself brings us up as our parents. It is He alone who looks after us. Otherwise where were you and where are you now? Your parents brought you up, but at last realized that you did not belong to them. Have you not seen a cuckoo brought up in the nest of a crow?

Disciple: Shall I realize God as really my 'own'?

Mother: Yes, surely you will realize Him. Whatever you yearn for, that you will get. Did not Swamiji (referring to Swami Vivekananda) realize Him? You too will realize Him as Swamiji did.

Disciple: Mother, please see that I am not overcome by fear or slackening of faith.

Mother: There is no such danger for you. For I myself have hooked the fish.

Disciple: That is good. We all shall enjoy it.

Mother: Yes, that is right. One makes the mould and many others make their images from it.

Disciple: Yes, we shall get everything if you only work for us. You cannot set us aside.

Mother: Yes, my child, you will have all if I do it for you.

Part 3: Conversations (Recorded by Swami Arupananda)

UDBODHAN 26th November, 1910, 7 a.m.

The Mother had gone the day before to see Gupta Maharaj (Swami Sadananda) who was ill. Boshi and Tabu were nursing him with great care. The Mother praised them, saying-, "They are really holy. Blessed indeed are they! Whom else shall we call holy?"

"YoginChatterjee's (Swami Nityananda's) disciples too nursed him carefully. They were all from East Bengal. All young boys used to serve the Master at Kasipur. He used to keep them in good humour by saying all sorts of things. He used to say, 'How will they be able to endure so much hardship, if they do not get any joy?' He was very tactful. He didn't need much nursing. His diet too was very spare. .

"One day he wanted to eat Amalaki (myrobalan). Durgacharan (Nag Mahashaya) came three days later with two or three very big ones. He had not eaten for three days. Taking the Amalaki in his hands, the Master was in tears. He said to Durgacharan, 'I thought that you had left for Dhaka or somewhere.' He then asked me to prepare a pungent dish for Durgacharan, as people from East Bengal like it pungent. When it was ready, the Master himself sat down to eat. Durgacharan had Prasada after the Master had tasted all the various preparations.

"The expenses at the Kasipur household were very high. Three separate menus had to be prepared: one for the Master, one for the youngsters like Naren, and one for the rest. Subscriptions were raised to meet the expenses. One of the devotees dropped away for fear of having to pay!

"The Master's disease was due to accepting the sins of others. He used to say, 'It is due to Girish's sins; He would not have been able to bear all this suffering.' The Master had the power to die at will. He could have easily given up the body in Samadhi. But he would say, 'It will be nice if I unite all these youngsters together in a close bond of love.' Until then, merely a 'how-do-you-do' relationship existed between them: 'Naren Babu, how are you?', 'Rakhal Babu, how do you do?', and so on. That is why the Master did not give up the body early, in spite of so much suffering."

UDBODHAN 14th April, 1911

In the morning I carried to the shrine the flowers meant for the worship of Sri Ramakrishna. It was late, so the Mother said, "Please come with the flowers as soon as they are brought." The Mother used to perform the worship after making all the necessary arrangements for it herself. She was sitting on her cot, and beckoned me near her and enquired about a certain devotee.

Mother: Is he downstairs?

Disciple: Yes, Mother.

Mother: What does he do? Is he studying?

Disciple: May be. But probably he is not a regular student.

Mother: Won't he go to the Belur Math?

Disciple: No. He doesn't want to go there.

Mother: All of you should persuade him.

Disciple: I tried my best. You please tell him, Mother. May be then he will go and stay at the Math at least for some days.

Mother: I have also told him, but he would pay no heed. He doesn't want to go. He fears that others may tease him for going there. Sarat also spoke to me about that boy: "Shouldn't the boy have some regard for our advice, and the words of Maharajji (Swami Brahmananda)? Let him go and stay for at least two days at the Math in obedience to Maharani's wish." That is right. The boy should go with Rakhal and stay for some days at Puri. How will the boy be able to wander about alone? Where will he get food?

Disciple: That is no problem. He will beg for food. But he should go to the Math once, at least in obedience to the advice of Maharaj and the other elders.

Mother: That is right. The advice of the elders must be obeyed. The boy has no desire to work. How can the mind be kept well without any work? Is it possible to meditate for all the twenty-four hours of the day? So one has to take up some work. That keeps the mind in good shape. How is your work going on?

Disciple: It is going on all right.

Mother: You had written about going to Rameswaram. It is good, my child, that you did not go. The journey is indeed hazardous.

Disciple: Sarat Maharaj wanted to send me. 'But from where could the funds come? Had I gone, all the burden of bearing the expenses would have fallen on Sashi Maharaj.

Mother: Yes. He has already spent a thousand rupees on our pilgrimage.

UDBODHAN 15th April, 1911

The next day Mother was preparing betel-rolls in the room to the south of the shrine. It was nearly 11 a.m. When I went to her, she enquired about the boy who had come on the previous day, "Has he left?"

Disciple: Yes. He may stay for a day or two at the house of Dr. Kanjilal. Sarat Maharaj said, "If the boy has left with pride and egoism, then he will degenerate more and more as days pass. And if he has left out of shame, then if the Master wills, he may again turn over a new leaf."

Mother: What does it matter? He is after all a boy, not a girl. It is easy to break. How many can build? All can criticize and make fun of him; but how many can bring him on the right path? Man is prone to weakness.

Disciple: Sarat Maharaj said, "It is possible for only a noble-minded person to live alone, while one with an impure mind becomes all the more degenerated thereby."

Mother: Why should he fear? The Master will protect him. Are there not many monks who live all alone?

Disciple: Even Hriday Mukherjee lost the company of the Master in later days.

Mother: Is it possible for anyone to enjoy a good thing eternally?

Disciple: He, it seems, had also troubled the Master a lot, and used very offensive language with him.

Mother: When one has done so much dedicated service, what does it matter if he says a few unpleasant things? It is natural for one who really takes so much care, to say sometimes things like that.

Disciple: This boy too served you very much and now see what has happened!

Mother: How is it possible to get along without any discipline? How else can one improve?

JAYRAMBATI

In the month of Aswin, on the day of the Mahasaptami, the first day of the worship of Mother Durga, two young devotees presented themselves before the Mother. On the Mahashtami day they offered lotus flowers at the feet of the Mother. One of them said, "Mother please, ordain me into the vows of Sannyasa." The other young boy too joined in the request. The Mother smiled a little and said, "All in due course, children. Why do you worry?" The devotee persisted, "Mother, you must give us Sannyasa. Give us the ochre cloth."

The Mother now spoke a little seriously: "What will you gain by putting on the ochre cloth? What is so special in it? Neither of you have entered married life; you are already Sannyasins. All the other things will follow in due course. "

The devotee said, "Mother, I wish to throwaway my sacred thread, cloth, and all, and remain absorbed in the contemplation of the Divine like Trailanga Swami." Mother said smilingly, "It will happen, child, when the right time comes." Now the devotee began speaking rather excitedly: "Mother, here it is—I am throwing away the cloth and the sacred-thread," and actually was

about to do so, when the Mother said rather hurriedly, "Enough of it now. At proper time, these things will leave you by themselves."

Still his childish behaviour did not stop. He said, "Bless me Mother, with at least a drop of madness that had come upon the Master. Make me mad, Mother." And again, "Mother, will you not endow us with devotion? Won't you bestow on us the vision of the Master?" Mother said, "Everything will come to pass, my child, in due course." Both the boys went out of the room after prostrating themselves before the Mother.

At noon, all sat down for meals. The same young devotee again spoke, "How have you cooked this rice-pudding? It does not at all taste well." The Mother smiled and said, "What can I do, child? Sufficient quantity of milk is not available here." Kedar's mother was nearby. She said, "Very good. You are all Mother's children. Bring plenty of things, and then the Mother will be able to feed you to your heart's content." This did not even reach the devotee's ears. He went on, "Mother, today I could not eat my fill. I will come gain and eat to my satisfaction. You must also allow me to meet you one day at the Udbodhan." The Mother agreed to this request.

In the forenoon a devotee had arrived from Shillong. Doubtful about the divine nature of the Mother; he had taken a vow that he would not visit her unless he had seen her in dream seven times. He had the requisite visions. Therefore he had gone to Jayrambati to pay his respects to her. In the afternoon, as he was about to take leave of her, he said, "Mother, I shall say good-bye now. Do I need anything else?"

Mother: Yes, surely. You must have your initiation.

Devotee: I may have it at Baghbazar in Calcutta.

Mother: Better finish that task, my child. Have your initiation today.

Devotee: But I have eaten the Prasada.

Mother: That doesn't matter.

After the initiation, the devotee departed.

The mental state of the eccentric devotee who had come in the morning took a turn for the worse. After he returned home from Jayrambati, he became restless for the vision of the Master. He felt piqued to think that though the Holy Mother could, by her mere will, make him get a vision of Sri Ramakrishna, she refused to do so. In a very angry state of mind he came back to Jayrambati and said to her, "Mother, won't you enable me to see the Master?" The Mother said tenderly, "Yes, you will see Him; don't be so restless." He could not stand it any longer. He said in an angry voice, "You are only deceiving me. Here is the rosary you gave me. Take it back. I don't care for it any more." With these words he threw the rosary at her. "All right," said the Mother, "remain for ever the child of Sri Ramakrishna!" He left the place at once.

Afterwards the devotee went really mad. He began writing abusive letters to the Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission and did not spare even the Holy Mother in this respect.

One day, referring to this devotee, I asked the Holy Mother, "Did he also return the Mantra? He threw away his rosary. Can anyone ever return the Mantra?"

Mother: Is it ever possible? The word of the Mantra is living. Can anyone, who has received it, give it back? Can he, once having felt attraction for the Guru, get rid of him? Some day in the future this man will come round and fall at the feet of those whom he now abuses.

Devotee: Why does such a thing come to pass?

Mother: Such things do happen. One Guru may initiate many disciples, but can they all be of the same nature? Spiritual life manifests in a devotee according to his nature. He said to me, at Jayrambati, "Mother, make me mad." "Why?" said I, "why should you be mad, my child? Can anyone, without committing much sin, ever be mad?" He said, "My younger brother has seen the Master. Please let me also have a vision of Him." I said in reply, "Who can ever see him with the physical eyes? But one may do so by closing one's eyes. Can we not visualize a picture by closing the eyes? Your brother is a child. He may have visualized the Master with his eyes closed, but he thinks that he has seen him with his eyes open." I asked him to continue his spiritual life—to practise spiritual disciplines and pray to the Master—and told him that he also would have the vision. Man knows in his

own mind how far he has advanced and how much knowledge and consciousness of God he has attained. He knows in his innermost soul how much of God he has realized. Besides, who has been able to see God with his physical eyes?

This devotee, after having been scolded at the Udbodhan Office, used to live on the bank of the Ganges. Sometimes he would sit on the door-step of the Udbodhan Office and would take his meal there. After some time, he was brought once to the Holy Mother with her permission. She tried to pacify him in various ways and said, "The Master used to say, 'At the time of death I shall have to stand by those who pray to me.' These are words from his own mouth. You are my child. What should you be afraid of? Why should you behave like a mad man? That will disgrace the Master. People will say that his devotee has become mad. Should you conduct yourself in a way that will discredit the name of the Master? Go home and live as others do. Eat and live like them. At the time of your death, he will reveal himself to you and take you to him. Can you tell me if anyone ever got a vision of him with physical eyes? It was only Naren (Swami Vivekananda) who saw him thus. That happened in America when he had intense yearning for him. Naren then used to feel that the Master was grasping his arm. That vision also lasted only for a few days. Now go home and live there happily. How miserable are the worldly people! The other day Ram's son passed away. You can at least sleep with an easy heart."

The devotee was much pacified by the Holy Mother's consolation and words of instruction. He took his meal at the Udbodhan Office and later returned to his native village. He gradually regained his normal state of mind.

JAYARAMBATI

26th May, 1911

The Holy Mother returned to Calcutta from her pilgrimage to Rameswaram and after a few days went back to Jayrambati. One evening, while seated on the porch of her old house, she asked me about a monastic devotee.

Mother: What did he say?

Disciple: He felt a yearning for you for three or four months.

Mother: How strange! A sannyasin must sever all the bondage of Maya. A golden chain is as good a shackle as an iron one. A sannyasin must not entangle himself in any form of Maya. Why should he constantly say, "Oh! Mother's love! Mother's love! I am deprived of it"! What ideas! I do not like man constantly hanging on me. At least he has the form of a man; I am not talking to God. And I have to move about with women. Ashu also used to come to me frequently to make sandal paste or on some other pretext.

Disciple: Will the sannyasins who profess the ideals of Vedanta attain to Nirvana?

Mother: Surely. By gradually cutting off the bonds of Maya they will realize Nirvana and merge themselves in God. This body is, no doubt, the outcome of desires. The body cannot live unless there is a trace of desire. All comes to an end when a man gets rid of desires completely.

Children (i.e. devotees) come here, eat their meals, enjoy themselves and then go away. Why should I be attached to them? One day Hazra said to the Master: "Why do you constantly long for Narendra and other youngsters? They are quite happy by themselves, eating, drinking and playing. You had better fix your mind on God. Why should you be attached to them?" At these words, the Master took his mind away from the young disciples and merged it in the thought of God. Instantaneously he entered into Samadhi; his bearded hair stood straight on end like the kadamba flower. Just imagine what kind of a man the Master was! His body became hard like a wooden statue. Ramlal, who was attending on him, said repeatedly, "Please be your former self again." At last the mind came down to the normal plane. It was only out of compassion for people that he kept his mind on the lower plane.

At the time of death, Yogen (Swami Yogananda) wanted Nirvana. Girish Babu said to him, "Look here, Yogen! Don't accept Nirvana. Don't think of the Master as pervading the entire universe, the sun and the moon forming his eyes. Think of the Master as he used to be to us, and thus thinking of Him, go to Him." Deities and angels, whoever they be, are born again on this earth. They do not eat or talk in their subtle bodies. Hence, they cannot stay in those planes for long.

Disciple: If they neither eat nor talk, then how do they spend their days?

Mother: Immersed in meditation they remain where they are, like wooden images, for ages! Like the images of the kings I saw at Rameswaram, standing there dressed in royal robes! When God needs them, he brings them down from their respective places. There are different heavenly planes, such as the Jana-loka, Satya-loka, and Dhruva-loka. The Master said that he had brought down Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) from the plane of the Seven Sages (Saptarshi). His words are verily the words of the Veda. They can never be untrue.

Disciple: Must we also, then, live like images of wood or clay?

Mother: Oh, no! You will serve the Master. There are two classes of devotees. One class devotes itself to the service of God, as on this earth; and another group is immersed in meditation for ages, like the images.

Disciple: Well, Mother, the Master used to say that the Isvarakotis can come back to the relative plane of consciousness even after the attainment of Nirvana; others cannot do so. What does that mean?

Mother: The Isvarakoti, even after the attainment of Nirvana, can gather back his mind from it and direct it to the ordinary plane of consciousness.

Disciple: How can the mind that has merged itself in God be brought back again to the world? How can one ever separate a jar of water from the water of the lake, if it has been poured into it?

Mother: Not all can do so. Only the Paramahamsa can. A Hamsa can separate the milk from a mixture of water and milk, and drink only the milk.

Disciple: Can all get rid of desires?

Mother: If they could, then this creation would have come to an end. The creation is going on because all cannot be free of desires. People with desires take their births again and again.

Disciple: Suppose a man gives up his body standing in the waters of the Ganges.

Mother: Freedom from birth is possible only when there is no trace of desire. Otherwise, nothing else is of any avail. If one does not get rid of desires, what will one gain, even if this be one's last birth in this world?

Disciple: Mother, infinite is this creation; who can tell what is happening in a 'remote plane? Who can say if any living beings inhabit any of those innumerable stars and planets?

Mother: It is possible only for God to be omniscient in this realm of Maya. Perhaps there is no living being in those planets and stars.

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One day in the rainy season of the same year, 1911, Swami Saradananda, Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma and several other devotees went to Kamarpukur from Jayrambati. Yogin-Ma slipped on the road. Some parts of her body were injured and blood flowed. I returned to Jayrambati ahead of the party and told the Holy Mother about Yogin-Ma's accident. The Mother said sadly, "Golap said before they set out, 'Yogin is going with us; let us see how often she slips on the road.' Yogin fell down to vindicate Golap's words. After all, those were the words of a spiritual woman. She practises spiritual disciplines. Therefore her words must bear fruit. Hence a holy person must not say anything bad about anyone."

UDBODHAN

16th January, 1912

In the morning I was with the Holy Mother in her room. I said to her, "Mother, Sri Chaitanya one day blessed Narayani, saying, 'May you have devotion to Krishna!' The words had such a magic effect that the girl, only three or four years old} rolled on the ground uttering. 'Ah, Krishna! Ah, Krishna!' We have read a story about Narada. After he had realized God, one day he felt compassion for an ant. He said to himself, 'I have attained to perfection as the result of practising austerities through many human births, and this poor ant will have to wait so long, even before it is born as a man!' Tenderly he blessed the ant, saying, 'Be free!' Immediately the ant assumed such non-human forms as birds, beasts, and so forth, and gradually took the body of a man. It passed through many human births, enjoyed the experiences associated with them, and step by step directed its attention to

spiritual disciplines. It worshipped God and attained salvation. Narada saw in the twinkling of an eye all these events of innumerable births. Therefore one may get liberation instantaneously through-the grace of a great soul"

Mother: That is true.

Disciple: But I have also heard that one cannot keep one's body long, if one accepts the burden of the sins of others. The body that might have been instrumental in getting salvation for many withers away for the sake of one sinful person.

Mother: That's also true. Further, a great soul thus loses his power. The power of austerities and spiritual disciplines that might have been utilized for the liberation of many souls is spent for the sake of one person. The Master used to say, "I have all these physical ailments because I have taken upon myself the sins of Girish." But now Girish also is suffering.

Disciple: Mother, one day I had a dream. I saw that a man with shaggy hair came to you and insisted that you must do something for him at once. He had previously been initiated by you. But he himself would not practise any spiritual discipline. You said, "If I do something for him then I shall not live; my body will fall off immediately." With all the earnestness I could command, I forbade you to show any kindness to this man and said, "Why should you do anything for him? He will achieve his own salvation. Let him practise sadhana." As he insisted again and again, you became disgusted with him, did something to him by touching his chest and neck, and said repeatedly, "If I do something for him, then I shall not live; my body will fall off immediately:" Then my dream disappeared. Well, is it true that one's power becomes limited when one is born in a physical body?

Mother: Yes, that is so. Many a time, disgusted with the repeated requests of some persons, I think, "Well, this body will die some day. Let it fall off this moment. Let me give him salvation."

Disciple: Mother, does the vision of God mean the attainment of knowledge (Jnana) and spiritual consciousness (Chaitanya)? Or, does it signify something else?

Mother: What else can it mean except the attainment of these? Does anybody mean to say that a man of realization grows two horns?

Disciple: Many of your devotees explain the vision of God differently. They believe that one sees God with physical eyes and talks to Him.

Mother: Yes, they say, "Please show us the Father." But he (Sri Ramakrishna) is nobody's father. The three words-Guru, Master (Karta) and Father (Baba)-pricked him like thorns. How many sages practised austerities for ages and ages! Still they could not realize God: And now people will not practise disciplines or undergo austerities, but they must be shown God immediately! I can't do it. Can you tell me if he (Sri Ramakrishna) had shown God to anyone?

Disciple: Well, Mother, we hear that some seek but do not get; while others do not seek but get. What does this mean?

Mother: God has the nature of a child. Some beg but He does not give them, while others do not want but He asks them to accept. Perhaps the latter had many meritorious acts to their credit in their past births. Therefore God's grace descends on them.

Disciple: Then is there discrimination even in the grace of God?

Mother: Yes, that's true. Everything depends upon Karma (one's past actions). The moment one's Karma comes to an end, one realizes God. That is one's last birth.

Disciple: I admit that the cessation of actions (Karma-kshaya); spiritual disciplines and time are the factors in the attainment of spiritual knowledge and consciousness. But if God be our very 'own', then can't He reveal Himself to His devotees by His mere will?

Mother: That is right. But who has this faith that He is his 'own'? All practise these or those disciplines because they think it their duty to do so. But how many seek God?

Disciple: Once I said to you that the child does not recognize even its own mother, if it is deprived of her care and love.

Mother: Yes, you have spoken truly. How can one love another unless one sees him? You see, you have seen me. I am your Mother and you are my child.

UDBODHAN

1st February, 1912

It was about half past nine in the evening when I went to the Holy Mother. I had not seen her for the whole day

Mother: Where have you been the whole day?

Disciple: I have been busy with accounts downstairs.

Mother: Yes, Prakash told me so. Can anyone who has renounced the world relish these things? Once there was a mistake in the accounts relating to the salary of the Master. I asked him to talk to the manager of the Temple about it. But he said, "What a shame! Shall I bother myself about accounts?" Once he said to me, "He who utters the Name of God never suffers from any misery. No need to speak about you!" These are his very words. Renunciation was his ornament.

Part 4: Conversations (Recorded by Swami Arupananda)

UDBODHAN
8th February, 1912

A mat used to be spread on the northern side of the room adjacent to the shrine. The Mother used to sit there often in the mornings. Sometimes she would perform Japa there facing the east. Whenever we came to talk with the Mother, we too would sit there. Today also the Mother was sitting on the mat.

Disciple: Mother, how long did you stay at Dakshineswar?

Mother: For a long time. I came when I was sixteen. Since then, I was always there. Occasionally, I would visit our village-home, as when I did to attend the wedding of Ramlal. I would go there every two or three years.

Disciple: Were you alone at any time?

Mother: Yes, on some occasions. My mother-in-law would be there at other times. Sometimes Golap, Gaurdasi and others would stay with me. We cooked, lived and ate all in that tiny room.

I used to cook for the Master. He had poor digestion. So he could not eat the food offerings from the Kali temple. I had to cook also for the devotees of the Master. Latu lived with him. Having had a difference with Ram Datta, he had come away. The Master said to me, 'He is a nice boy; he will knead four for you.' Cooking went on day and night. For instance Ram Datta would come, and would shout after getting out of the carriage, 'Today I shall have Chapatis (Indian bread) and gram Dal (a kind of soup).' Then I would at once start cooking. I used to make Chapatis out of three or four seers of flour. When Rakhal lived there, I often made Khichuri for him. The Master one day asked me to cook nicely for Naren. I prepared some Mung (green gram) soup and Chapatis. When the meal was over, the Master asked Naren,' 'How did you enjoy the meal?' 'Very well,' he replied, 'but it tasted like sick diet.' At this the Master said to me, 'What sort of stuff have you cooked for him? You must prepare for him thick gram Dal and heavy Chapatis.' Finally I prepared those things and Naren was very pleased. Suren Mitra gave ten rupees a month for the expenses of the Devotees. Gopal Senior did the

marketing. Dancing, devotional music, ecstasy and Samadhi went on day and night. I made little holes in the bamboo mat screen, so that I could watch through it. As a result of standing there continually, I got this rheumatism at last.

There was an old woman who came often. She had led an impure life. Now in old age, she had become religious. I was alone. So whenever she came, I would talk to her. One day the Master saw this and said, "Why do you allow her here?" I said. "Now she speaks of only good things, talks only of God. What is wrong with it? One's mind cannot be coloured always by one's former condition?' The Master said, "No, no, she is a fallen woman. Why talk with her? However changed she may be, it is better to keep away." He used to forbid me from even speaking with such people lest their evil influence may affect me. Such was the extreme care he took of me.

Once at Kamarpukur a man came to meet the Master. He had a bad character. No sooner had he left, than the Master said, "Throwaway a basketful of soil from this place." When no one heeded his words, he himself dug out with a spade some soil from the spot where the man was seated. "Wherever such people sit," he said, "even the soil of that place becomes impure!"

Durgacharan of East Bengal would visit him. What great devotion he had for the Master! He brought Amalaki (myrobalan) at the time of the Master's illness. Since it was not the proper season he had brought it after a vigorous search for three full days, with no thought of food and sleep! Once I gave him Prasada on a leaf-plate (at the old Baghbazar residence on the banks of the Ganga). Such was his devotion, he ate it leaf and all! He was dark and thin, but his eyes were large and sparkling-eyes of a devotee, always moist with the tears of divine love!

In those days there were many such great devotees. Those who come nowadays simply keep on saying, "Give us the vision of the Master!" They do no spiritual practice, no Japa, no meditation; Lord knows, how many wicked things they have done in their past lives—go-hatya (killing of a cow), brahma-hatya (slaying of a Brahmana), bhruna-hatya (foeticide)! First of all, the evil effects of these wicked acts have to be counteracted slowly and steadily. Suppose the moon is covered by the clouds. Only when the wind gradually takes the clouds away the moon becomes visible. Do the clouds vanish in the twinkling of an eye? Spiritual life also is like that.

Karma is exhausted gradually. When one realizes God, He endows one with spiritual illumination within. One becomes aware of it oneself.

UDBODHAN
9th February, 1912

Girish Chandra Ghosh had given up his body on the previous night. Referring to him, I asked the Holy Mother, "Well, Mother, do those who give up their bodies in a state of unconsciousness attain to a higher spiritual state afterwards?"

Mother: The thought that is uppermost in mind before one loses consciousness determines the course of one's soul after death.

Disciple: Yes, that is true. A little after six o'clock in the evening Girish Babu exclaimed, "Jai Ramakrishna! Let us go," and then fell unconscious. Afterwards he never regained his consciousness. A few minutes before, he had been constantly saying, "Let us go, let us go!" "Hold me a little, my son!" and so forth. I said to him, "Why do you only say, 'Let us go, let us go! You had better repeat the name of Sri Ramakrishna, which will do you real good.' I said that a couple of times when Girish Babu replied, "Do I not know that?" I said to myself, "Oh, he is fully conscious within!"

Mother: He remained immersed in the thought that was in his mind when he became unconscious. They (referring to Sri Ramakrishna's disciples) all have come from him and will go back to him (i.e. the Master). They all have come from him—from his arms, feet, hair and so forth. They are his limbs, his parts.

UDBODHAN, Mother's Room
21st February, 1912

It was seven o'clock in the morning. The Holy Mother was seated on the floor near her couch. Swami Nirbhayananda, who had gone to Dwaraka on pilgrimage, sent the Mother some Prasada from the shrine of Dattatreya in the Girnar Hills. The Mother asked, "Who was Dattatreya?"

Disciple: He, like Jada Bharata and others, was a great sage—an Isvarakoti.

Mother: Like some of the children of the Master?

Disciple: Well, how is it that some of the Isvarakotis among the Master's disciples are immersed in worldliness with their wives and children?

Mother: Yes, they are rotting there. Purna was forced to marry. His relatives threatened him, saying, "If you go to him (referring to Sri Ramakrishna), we will smash his carriage with stones and brick-bats when he comes to Calcutta."

Disciple: Well, they might have married. Nag Mahasaya also married. But to have children and lead a worldly life!

Mother: Perhaps they had some such desires. Let me tell you one thing. There is great complexity in this creation. The Master does one thing through one man and another thing through another person. Oh, it is so inscrutable! But even a householder can be an Isvarakoti. What is the harm?

Radhu was ill. She had pain and fever. The Mother was worried about her and said, "She cannot get well when I am alive. Who will look after her when I am gone? Will she live then?"

Disciple: What a crowd of devotees the whole day! You could not get a moment's respite.

Mother: Day and night, I say to the Master, "Please lessen this rush. Let me have a little rest." But I hardly get it. It will be like this for the few more days I am in this body. The message of the Master has spread everywhere; therefore so many people come here. There was such a massive crowd at Bangalore! As soon as I got down from the train, there was an incessant shower of flowers all the way. The road became full of flowers. Such crowds used to visit the Master also during his last days. I try to persuade people so earnestly, saying, "Have initiation from your family preceptor (Kulaguru). They expect something from you. I do not expect anything." But they will not leave me. They weep and it moves my heart. Well, I am nearing the end; these few days I continue to live, will be spent in this manner.

Disciple: Oh, no, Mother! Why should you say that? You are well. You have no particular ailment. Why do you, then, want to leave this world? Never say that again.

During those few days the Mother appeared very sad and indifferent about things.

Golap-Ma was having an argument with someone downstairs.

Hearing that, the Mother asked, "What is going on there?"

Disciple: Golap-Ma is scolding somebody.

Mother: It is not good to be so much talkative. One only invites misery for oneself by constantly dwelling on defects in everything. Golap has lost all sense of delicacy in her obsession about speaking the truth. I, for one, cannot bring myself to do that. An unpleasant truth should never be told.

On another occasion too Golap-Ma had told a very unpleasant truth to somebody. Mother had exclaimed, "What is this, Golap? How has your nature become like this?"

During the noon time a hot-headed man had come to the Holy Mother and created a row. Referring to this, she said, "The Master did not let anybody know of my existence. He protected me always with infinite care. Now the thing has gone to the other extreme; they are advertising me as if by a beat of drum in a market-place. M. is the root of it all. People are beside themselves after reading Kathamrita (or the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna). Girish Babu enforced his demands on the Master and abused him. Now people are doing the same thing with me.

"Why should they always bother me about initiation? They are my children (referring to the direct disciples of the Master) at the Belur Math. Have they no power? Everyone is being sent here! I went so far as to tell people that they would be incurring great sin if they give up their hereditary preceptor. But still they would not leave me alone."

Disciple: You initiate the devotees because you desire to do so.

Mother: No, I do so out of compassion. They won't leave me. They weep. I feel compassion for them. Out of kindness I give them initiation. Besides, what do I gain by it? When I initiate devotees, I have to accept their sins. Then I think, "Well, this body will die anyway; let them realize the truth."

UDBODHAN
24th April, 1912

It was 1:30 p.m. I went to the Mother's room after noon-meals to bring betel-rolls. Referring to somebody, the Mother recited a verse. I asked her what it meant.

Mother: It means that a man cannot change his nature. Sri Chaitanya Deva said, "I adore him who is able to give up his past habits and worship the Lord.

Disciple: Once you had said at Jayrambati, "It would be well if one were able to change one's nature." On another occasion you had said, "There are some whose very appearance evokes feelings of love; and some there are who evoke just the contrary feelings."

Mother: You are right, my child. One's nature is what really counts. What else matters?

Disciple: Sarat Maharaj said about Golap-Ma, "If she gives even a tender-coconut, the entire household will know of it by her shoutings."

Mother: True, nowadays such indeed has become their habit. For minor things, they raise a hue and cry. Yogen (Yogin-Ma) was very calm and steady earlier. Now I find she has changed. Forbearance is a great virtue. No other quality is greater than this.

I had a severe headache. I went to the Mother's room in the afternoon and told her about it. She said, "It is probably due to the heat." She then mixed up some ghee and camphor, and making a paste of it, applied it on my forehead with a gentle massage. "Whenever the Master had headache, he would apply this medicine," she said.

I started feeling a little better after a few minutes of massage, and came downstairs. After some time, the headache really disappeared. I went and told the Mother, "The headache is no more there, Mother!"

One lady from Poland had come to India to study Vedanta. She had heard in Calcutta about the Mother, and had come to meet her. She spoke to the Mother for some time. 'Referring to the Bahai sect, she said that its teachings

were similar to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna - they too preached the harmony of all religions. From her talk it appeared that the lady herself belonged to the Bahai sect.

After she had left, I asked the Mother, "How did you find her?"

Mother: Very nice.

Disciple: These people have come from very far. Now the news has spread like wild fire! Where is Poland, and where indeed is the Udbodhan Office! Mother, you are not even aware of it!

Mother: The Master had said once in a divine mood, "In course of time, I will be worshipped in every home. Innumerable indeed will be my devotees!" Nivedita once said, "Mother, we too are Hindus. As a result of our Karma, we were born in another country. But we too will become Hindus in true spirit!" This is their (of Nivedita and others) last birth.

UDBODHAN, Prayer-Hall, 7 a.m.

April, 1912

Sri Surendra Chakravarty had visited the Mother a few days back along with his wife. A few days later he came alone. Prostrating before the Mother, he said, "Mother, we alone have been deprived of the vision of the Master."

Mother: You will get it in due course. This is your last birth. Nivedita said, "Mother, we too are Hindus. But due to our Karma, we were born Christians." This birth is the last one for them too.

The Mother often said this birth being the last one about many people. So I decided to ask her about it that day.

Disciple: Mother, what is the meaning of the 'last birth'?'

The Master spoke about the last birth of many people. You too often say it.

Mother: The last birth means that the person has not to come again and again (i.e. he does not have to take repeated births). This life marks an end of all that.

Disciple: But it is seen that many of these people are not free from desires—their family, wife and children. Unless the desires are given up, how can the repeated coming be ended?

Mother: Whatever the Master has said about anyone, will come to pass, come what may. His words cannot be falsified. Whether or not the person has desires in his present state, the Master had foreseen that in the end, all the desires will leave such a person. He had divined this regarding some people.

Disciple: Does the last birth imply the attainment of Nirvana?

Mother: Of course, it does. In some cases, it is possible, that the mind will become absolutely bereft of all desires just before death.

Disciple: Mother, the Master has referred to many people as his very 'own'. What does it mean?

Mother: He used to say, "Some of them have come from this body, some from the hair, some from the hands and feet. They are my eternal companions." As for instance, a king. Wherever he goes; all his companions follow him. If I go to Jayrambati, do not all my companions accompany me? Exactly like that, those who are one's 'own' are companions age after age.

The Master used to say, "Those belonging to the “inner circle” are my companions in weal and woe." Pointing to the young boys who came to him, he would say, "They are happy in my happiness, miserable in my sorrow; in weal and woe they are always with me."

Whenever he comes, all the others follow. He had brought Naren from the Saptarshi. While meditating in the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, he saw in a vision Sambhu Mallick standing behind Mother Kali. He had even seen Balaram Babu in a vision. When he met him for the first time, he could immediately recognize, "Yes! I saw him like this—with a turban, and of fair complexion."

Once the Master said, "Why did they offer the food before the photograph (of the Master) instead of offering it to the Mother Kali?" We were a little

uneasy that this smelt of a bad omen. The Master, however, comforted us, saying, "Don't worry. You will see, in due course, I will be worshipped in every home. I swear; it will come to pass!"

The people nowadays are clever—they have taken his photograph! Take the case of Master Mahasaya. Is he an ordinary soul? He has noted down all the words of the Master. Which Avatara has been photographed, and whose words been recorded in this fashion?

Disciple: Master Mahasaya said about the Kathamrita (or The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna) that the available material with him will make up ten or twelve volumes. Lord knows, when all of it will be published!

Mother: True. He too has become old now. Who knows, he may not live long enough to complete everything.

Disciple: Mother, didn't you tell me at Jayrambati, that the Master will come again among his white-skinned devotees?

Mother: No, I said that many white-skinned devotees will come to him. Don't you see, for instance, many Christians getting attracted towards the Master'! He had said, he will stay for a hundred years in the hearts of the devotees, and then come again. I told him, "I do not want to come again!" Lakshmi too said that she wouldn't come again, even if she were chopped into shreds like tobacco leaves! The Master smiled and said, "How can you escape? Our roots arc twined together like the Kalmi plant (a kind of aquatic plant). A tug at one end will 'bring the whole lot up!"

But what do all these things matter? The Master used to say, "You have come to eat the- mangoes. What is the use of counting the leaves and branches?"

Disciple: Mother, I feel it is purposeless to live unless we have a direct vision of God. Once I asked a Mussalman Fakir, "A man sits with an angling rod on the bank of a lake or a river in the expectation of catching fish. He never does so near a mud-puddle. Have you got a glimpse of that for which you have become a religious mendicant?"

Mother: What did he say?

Disciple: What could he say?

Mother (after a little reflection): You have said the right thing. That is true. What does it avail a plan unless he gets some kind of realization? But one should continue to have faith in things spiritual.

Disciple: The other day Sarat Maharaj said as Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) also had remarked earlier, "Suppose there is a lump of gold in the adjoining room and a thief sees it from this room. There is an intervening wall which prevents him from taking possession of this precious metal. Under that condition, can the man ever sleep? All the time he would be thinking of how he might get at that lump of gold! In the same way, if a man is firmly convinced that there is such an entity as God, can he ever indulge in worldly life?"

Mother: That is true, indeed.

Disciple: Whatever you may say, Mother, renunciation and dispassion and the chief things. Shall we ever acquire them?

Mother: Certainly, you will gain everything if you but take refuge in the Master. Renunciation alone was his splendour. We utter his name and eat and enjoy things because he renounced all. People think that his devotees also must be very great, as he was a man of such complete renunciation.

Ah me! One day he went to my room in the Nahabat. He 'had no spices in his small bag. He used to chew them now and then. I gave him some to chew there, and also handed over to him a few packed in paper to take to his room. He proceeded; but instead of going to his room, he went straight to the embankment of the Ganges. He did not see the way, nor was he conscious of it. He was repeating, "Mother, shall I drown myself!" I became restless with agony. The river was full to the brim. I was then a young woman and would not go out of my room. I could not see anyone about. Whom could I send to him? At last I found a Brahmana belonging to the Kali temple coming in the direction of my room. Through him I called Hriday, who was then taking his meal. He left his plate, ran to the Master, caught hold of him, and brought him back to his room. A moment more, and he would have dropped into the Ganges!

Disciple: Why did he go towards the river?

Mother: Because I put a few spices in his hand, he could not find his way. A holy man must not lay things by. His renunciation was hundred per cent complete.

Once a Vaishnava Sadhu came to the Panchavati. At first he showed a great deal of renunciation. But alas! Finally like a rat, he began to pull and gather various things—pots, cups, jars, grain, rice, pulses and so forth. The Master noticed it and said one day, "Poor thing! This time he is going to be ruined!" He was about to be entangled in the snare of Maya. The Master advised him strongly about renunciation and further asked him to leave the place. Then he went away.

A devotee came in to salute the Mother. After he had left, she said, "I was once deceived by showing Harish my affection. Therefore I do not nowadays express my feelings towards anyone."

UDBODHAN
1st May, 1912

In the forenoon I went upstairs to read letters to the Holy Mother.

Disciple: The daughter of a devotee has written from her father-in-law's place that she would like to come here to see you. She has sent you her salutations. She has further requested you to be careful so that her husband's relatives might not know about her writing to you.

Mother: Then do not write any reply to her. She wants me to conceal it from her relatives! I do not know such a game of hide and seek. At Jayrambati, Jogindra, the postman, used to write letters for me. Many complained, saying, "Does the postman see our letters?" They did not like my asking a man in humble position to write my letters for them. Why? There is no deceit in me. Anybody who likes may see my letters.

Another devotee inquired as to when the Holy Mother would return to Jayrambati. I asked her, "May I tell the devotee that you will return there in autumn at the time of the Jagaddhatri Puja?"

Mother: Oh, no, no! Can one be sure of it? As to where I shall be, that remains entirely in the hands of God. Today man is, and tomorrow he is not.

Disciple: O Mother, why should you talk like that? It is because you are alive that so many people are able to see you and get peace of mind.

Mother: Yes, that is true.

Disciple: Please do remain for our sake.

In a tender voice, choked with emotion, she said, "Alas! How fond they are of me! I am also very fond of them. "Her eyes were moist with tears. The disciple was fanning her. She said to him in a most compassionate voice, "My child, I bless you from my heart that you live long, attain devotion, and enjoy peace. Peace is the principal thing. One needs peace alone."

Disciple: Mother, one idea, crops up in my mind constantly: Why do I not get the vision of the Master? As he is our very 'own', why does he not reveal himself to us? Can't he do so by his mere will?

Mother: That is true. Who can say why he does not reveal himself when you suffer from so many miseries and sorrows? Once Balaram's wife was ill. The Master said to me, "Go to Calcutta and visit her." "How can I go?" I said, "I don't see any carriage or other conveyance here." The Master replied in an excited voice: "What! Balaram's family is in such trouble and you hesitate to go! You will walk to Calcutta. Go on foot." At last a palanquin was brought and I set out from Dakshineswar. Twice I visited her during her illness. On another occasion I went on foot at night from Shyampukur. Where, indeed, will man be if God does not protect him in his trouble?

Disciple: I know sorrows and sufferings are inevitable so long as a man lives in the physical body. I do not ask the Master to remove the sufferings. But can't he console us by revealing himself to us in the midst of our troubles and sorrows?

Mother: You are right, my child! The only son of Ram (i.e., Balaram's grandson) died the other day. Ram's wife and mother came to me for peace of mind. They were relieved of their grief to some extent. I used to speak to the Master of such things and he would say, "I have millions of them. I shall cut my goat at the tail or through the back, and then kill it. It is my sweet will."

Disciple: Does he not see our suffering?

Mother: But he has so many like you. He used to tell me, "It is the ocean of consciousness and bliss. How many waves crop up and disappear! There is no end, no limit."

Disciple: A man in the street, whose spiritual consciousness has not been awakened at all, is quite happy. But those whose consciousness has been partially awakened and who want to realize God suffer a great deal if they do not see Him. They alone know how much they suffer!

Mother: Ah! How true it is! Ordinary people are quite happy. They eat, drink and make merry. The devotees alone know no end of suffering.

Disciple: Don't you suffer at the suffering of the devotees?

Mother: Why should I? He who has created the world looks after all.

Disciple: Don't you want to come back to this earth in a human form for the sake of the devotees?

Mother: Oh! Such suffering in a human body! No more! No more! May I not be born again! At the time of his illness, the Master expressed the desire to eat Amalaki. Durgacharan procured some after searching for them for three days without food and sleep. The Master asked him to take his meal and himself took some rice in order to turn the food into Prasada. I said to the Master, "You are taking rice quite well. Why, then, should your meal consist only of farina pudding? You should take rice rather than pudding." "No, no," said he, "I would rather take farina during these last days of my life." It was such unbearable suffering for him to eat even the farina! On some days, it would all spill out through his nose or throat!

Ah! I went to the temple of Siva at Tarakeswar, but that too proved fruitless. I lay before the Deity there for two days without food and drink, supplicating for some divine remedy for the Master's illness. On the second night, I was startled to hear a sound. It was as if some one was breaking a pile of earthen pots with one blow. I woke up and the idea flashed in my mind, "Who is a husband in this world, and of whom? Who is related to whom here? For whom am I sacrificing my life?" At a stroke all earthly ties were cut asunder, and the mind filled with renunciation! I groped my way

through the darkness, and 'Sprinkled my face with the holy water in the basin behind the temple. I also drank a little of it. The throat had dried up due to the two days' fast. Then I felt refreshed. The next day I returned to Cossipore. As soon as the Master saw me, he asked in good humour, "Well, did you get anything?—nothing at all!"

The Master too saw in a dream an elephant going out to get a medicine. Just as the elephant began digging the earth for the medicine, Gopal came and woke him up. He asked me whether I had seen any such dream.

I saw Mother Kali with her neck bent to one side. I asked Her, "Mother, why do you stand like that?" She replied, "It is because of this (pointing to the Master's sore in the throat); I too have it."

The Master told me, "I am being subjected to all the sufferings that there can be; none of you need have it again. I have taken upon myself the miseries of the whole world." The Master's disease was due to taking upon himself the sins of Girish.

All our sufferings are on this earth. Is there anything elsewhere? People suffer from endless miseries on account of their egoism and at last they say, "Not I, not I; it is Thou, O God! It is Thou!"

Disciple: Will you keep us in your mind hereafter?

Mother: Perhaps not when I enjoy divine bliss after my passing away. My child, time alone is the principal thing. Who knows what will happen in course of time?

Disciple: True, Mother, everything, no doubt, happens under the dominance of time; but there is also a subduer of time.

Mother: Yes, that is true.

Disciple: Please keep yourself well; then everything will be all right.

It was eight o'clock. The Mother asked, "Is it eight o'clock? Perhaps it is. It is time for worship in the shrine room. Let me go now."

I went upstairs with her mail. One of her disciples had passed away at Banaras. The Mother heard the news and remarked, "All must die some day. Instead of dying in a pool or on the bank of a lake, he has died in Banaras!"

Her brothers had written to her asking for money and telling about their family quarrels. I said to her, "Please see that they get plenty of money. Please tell the Master about it. Let them enjoy the material life and come to satiety."

Mother: Will they ever be satiated? Nothing can satisfy them; no, not even if they have plenty. Are the worldly people ever satiated with enjoyments? They always spin out the tale of their woes. It is Kali (one of her brothers) who always wants money. Now Prasanna (another brother) imitates him. Varada (a third brother) never asks for money. He says, "Where will sister get money from?"

Disciple: What about that insane lady? Does she want money?

Mother: She won't accept it even when offered.

Disciple: Why were you born in that family?

Mother: Why not? My father and mother were very good people. My father was a great devotee of Rama. He had unswerving devotion to the ideal of a Brahmana's life. He could not accept gifts indiscriminately. He loved to smoke, and as he smoked—he was so simple and humble—he would address in a friendly way every passer-by that crossed his door and say cordially, "Come in, brother. Have a smoke."

Part 5: Conversations (Recorded by Swami Arupananda)

UDBODHAN
25th June, 1912

It was morning. The Mother was seated near the bedstead in the room adjacent to the shrine. We were engaged in conversation.

Disciple: Some say that it is not good for the Sadhus (of the Ramakrishna Order) to work in the Sevashramas (Homes of Service) and dispensaries or to be pre-occupied with selling books, accounting and so forth. Did the Master ever undertake such activities? Works of this kind are thrust upon the seekers who enter the Order with a yearning for the realization of God. If anyone must do some work, it must be worship in the shrine, meditation, Japa and devotional music. Activities other than these entangle one in desires and turn one away from God.

Mother: You must pay no heed to those who talk in that manner. What will you do day and night if you are not engaged in work? Can one practise meditation and Japa for twenty-four hours? You referred to the Master. His case was different. Mathur used to supply him with proper diet. You are able to get your food because you are doing some work. Otherwise you would have to roam from door to door begging for a morsel of food. Perhaps you would fall ill. Besides, where are people today to give alms to the Sadhus? Never pay any heed to such words. Things will go on as the Master directs. The Math will be run on these lines. Those who cannot adjust themselves will go away.

One day Mani Mullick visited a Sadhu and reported to the Master. "Well," said the Master, "how did you like him?" "Yes," said Mani, "I saw the Sadhu but—." The Master asked, "But what?" "All want money," Mani Mullick replied. The Master said, "How much does a holy man want? Perhaps a pice for tobacco to smoke. That's all. You need your cups of ghee and milk, a mattress and such things; and the Sadhus want a pice for their smoke. Should they not have it?"

Disciple: Enjoyments come from desire alone. A man may live in a four-storied mansion; but he does not really enjoy anything if he has no desire for it. And a man may live under a tree but if he has desire, he gets all

enjoyments from that alone. The Master used to say, "A person may have no relatives anywhere; but Mahamaya may cause him to keep a cat and thus make him worldly. Such is Her play!"

Mother: That's true. Everything is due to desire. What bondage is there for a man who has no desire? You see, I live with all these things, but I do not feel any attachment; no, not in the least!

Disciple: Indeed, you can have no desires. But how many insignificant desires crop up in our minds! How can we get rid of them?

Mother: In your case these are no real desires. They are nothing. They are mere fancies that appear and disappear in your mind. The more they come and go, the better for you.

Disciple: Yesterday I wondered how I could fight with my mind unless God assured me of His protection. The moment one desire disappears another crops up.

Mother: So long as the ego exists, desires also undoubtedly remain. But those desires will not injure you. The Master will be your protector. It will be a heinous sin on the part of the Master if he does not protect those who have taken shelter at his feet, who have taken refuge in him renouncing all, and who want to lead a good life. You must live in a spirit of self-surrender to him. Let him do good to you if he so desires, or let him drown you if that be his will. But you are to do only what is righteous, and that also according to the power he has given you.

Disciple: Have, I, O Mother, surrendered to him to that extent? Sometimes I feel that I can depend upon him to a small extent, and the next moment it disappears. What will be the way for us if he does not protect us? Sometimes I think that because you, O Mother, are alive, we can report our dangers and difficulties to you and gain peace by a look at your face. Who will protect us when you leave us? We shall feel safe if you give us assurance.

Mother: Don't be afraid, my child. You have nothing to fear. You will not lead a worldly life with wife and children. You will have none of these. Why should you fear? And in the meantime, before I depart, you will be able to build up a secure foundation for your spiritual life.

Disciple: What will Japa and austerities avail us if God does not cast His benign look upon us? We shall be protected, only if He protects us.

Mother: You have nothing to fear. The Master will certainly protect you. Don't worry.

UDBODHAN 7th July, 1912

Disciple: Mother, was it not arranged that you would visit Puri at the time of the Car Festival (Ratha-yatra)?

Mother: Is it good to go there when there is such a rush of people? Perhaps there will be an epidemic of cholera then. Lakshmikanta, the priest, said, "All the rooms and houses have already been rented. There is no place now to stay in. Even the small rooms have been rented for ten rupees each. Please come during the winter."

Disciple: Whose image is worshipped there?

Mother: In a dream, I saw that it was really the image of Siva!

Disciple: Did you not see the image of Jagannath there?

Mother: No, I saw only the image of Siva. The Lord Jagannath Siva was seated on the altar made of a lakh of Salagrams (an emblem of Vishnu). Is it without any reason that thousands of devotees visit the temple? There is also the image of goddess Vimala. A special offering is made to her on the Mahashtami night. Vimala Devi is another form of Sri Durga. So is it not natural that Siva too will be present there?

Disciple: Some are of the opinion that this was originally a Buddhist temple, and the image of Buddha was installed there. When the temple fell into the hands of the followers of Sankaracharya, the image was converted into the emblem of Siva, and still later, when the Vaishnavas got control, they converted it into the image of Sri Jagannath—Vishnu.

Mother: I do not know all this. But I saw the image of Siva!

Disciple: How many temples, how many images of gods and goddesses the Mussalmans have destroyed! They have cut off the noses of some of the images and the ears of others.

Mother: The image of Sri Govindaji of Vrindaban was taken to Jaipur in fear of these Muslim invaders. The priests became upset and insisted that the Deity be brought back. At last they heard a Divine Oracle: "The image has gone, not I! Prepare another image and I shall stay in it!"

Disciple: There is the temple of Somanath in Gujarat. The priests, in former times, used to bathe the Deity daily with water from Gangotri. Every day people used to carry water from the Himalayas in pots on their heads. Sultan Mohammed demolished the image and carried away the temple doors that were made of sandal wood. Why should that happen?

Mother: The wicked do not feel the Divine presence in the image. The Deity disappears, as it were, before them. He can do whatever He likes by His mere Will. This also is a sport of God.

Disciple: Can the effect of Karma be made null and void? The Scriptures say that knowledge alone can destroy Karma. Still one must reap the result of Prarabdha Karma.

Mother: Karma alone is responsible for our misery and happiness. Even the Master had to suffer from the effect of Karma. Once his elder brother was drinking water while delirious. The Master snatched the glass out of his hand after he had drunk just a little. The brother became angry and said, "You have stopped me from drinking water. You will also suffer likewise. You will also feel such pain in your throat." The Master said, "Brother, I did not mean to injure you. You are ill. Water will harm you. That is why I have taken the glass away. Why have you, then, cursed me in this manner?" The brother said, weeping, "I do not know, brother. These words have come from my mouth. They cannot but bear fruit." At the time of his illness the Master told me, "I have got this ulcer in my throat because of that curse. None of you need suffer in future. I have taken all your sufferings." I said to him in reply, "How can an ordinary man possibly live if such a thing as this can happen to you?" The Master remarked, "My brother was a righteous man. His words must come true. Can the words of anyone and everyone be thus fulfilled?"

The result of Karma is inevitable. But by repeating the Name of God, you can lessen its intensity. If you were destined to have a wound as wide as a ploughshare, you will get a pin-prick at least. The effect of Karma can be counteracted to a great extent by Japa and austerities. This was the case with king Suratha. He had worshipped the Goddess by slaughtering a lakh of goats. Later on, these hundred thousand goats killed the king with one stroke of the sword; he did not have to be born a hundred thousand times. That was because he had worshipped the Divine Mother. Chanting God's holy Name lessens the intensity of Karmic effects.

Disciple: If that be so, then the law of Karma is supreme in this world. Then why should one believe in God? The Buddhists accept the law of Karma but not God.

Mother: Do you mean to say that there are no Deities like Kali, Krishna, Durga and the like?

Disciple: Is the effect of Karma destroyed by austerities and Japa?

Mother: Why not? It is good to do the right kind of work. One feels happy in doing good and one suffers by doing evil.

UDBODHAN (Morning)

Disciple: Mother, sometimes I see you reading the Ramayana. When did you learn to read?

Mother: Sometimes I used to accompany the other children to the village school. There I learnt a little. Later on Lakshmi and I used to read the Bengali Primer at Kamarpukur. My nephew Hriday snatched the book away from me. He said, "Women should not learn to read and write. Are you preparing yourself in this way to read novels and dramas later on?' But Lakshmi did not give up the book. She belonged to the family; therefore she held on to her book. I too secretly had a copy bought for one anna. Lakshmi used to attend the village school. On returning home she would teach me. But I really improved my capacity to read only long after, at Dakshineswar. The Master was staying then at Syampukur for treatment. I was all alone. A girl belonging to the family of Bhava Mukherji used to come to the temple garden to bathe in the Ganga. Now and then she would spend a long time with me. She used to give me lessons and afterwards examine me. And in

return, I would give her a large quantity of greens, vegetables and other articles of food that were sent to me from the temple-garden.

Disciple: Mother, did the Master visit Jayrambati often or just once or twice?

Mother: He visited many times. Sometimes he even stayed there for ten or twelve days. Whenever he would visit Kamarpukur, he also visited Jayrambati, Sihar and other places. He once fed the village cowherd boys at Sihar.

Disciple: When was this? During the period of his Sadhana or later on?

Mother: It was later on. During the period of Sadhana, he was filled, as it were, with a terrible divine madness. Had he visited his father-in-law's place then, all would have stamped him as insane.

When Siva visited his father-in-law's house, all began lamenting, "Oh! Dear Uma, great indeed has been your misfortune! You have at last fallen into the company of this hemp-addict!" Ah! In those days (after the marriage), the things they spoke about the Master! - "Alas! A mad son-in-law! What will happen now?" and so on.

Disciple: Yesterday Sri Manindra Gupta came. I had not met him earlier.

Mother: He did come once before. As a young boy, he used to visit the Master.

Disciple: The younger Naren too never comes here. Mother: No, he doesn't. At Dakshineswar, he used to go to the Master. He was dark and slim, with face covered with pox marks. The Master had great affection for him.

Disciple: Paltu Babu came here only once. Tarak Babu (of Belgharia) comes occasionally.

Mother: Paltu too visits now and then. He gives me a rupee every month. He is very poor himself. If I am in Jayrambati he sends the money there.

Paltu and Manindra visited the Master as kids merely ten or eleven years old! At Cossipore, on the day of the Dol-Yatra, all were out celebrating the festival, sprinkling abir (a kind of red perfumed powder) over one another

with great joy. These two boys did not go. Both were fanning the Master, changing hands frequently. They were too young to manage it single-handed! They massaged the Master's feet. The Master was suffering from severe headache due to cough. So constant fanning was necessary.

The Master told them, "Go, go out and play with abir. See, all are out enjoying!" Paltu said, "No, sir, we will not go. We will remain here. Is it possible for us to leave you here all by yourself?" No amount of persuasion made them go out to participate in the festive occasion. The Master wept as he said later, "These are indeed my Ramlala come to take care of me. So tender in age, yet the festivities outside could not make them leave me and go!" Saying this, the Master's eyes were full of tears.

Disciple: Many devotees used to visit the Master. Where are they now? None of them comes to see you.

Mother: Oh, they are all leading happy Jives!

Disciple: What? Happy!

Mother: You are right. How can a man be happy in this world with his wife and children? They have forgotten themselves in 'woman and gold'. Everything in the world results in suffering, after all.

Disciple: Besides, the mind has outgoing propensities.

Mother: Kali, the Mother of the universe, is the Mother of all. It is She alone who has begotten both good and evil. Everything has come out of Her womb. There are different kinds of perfect souls—perfect from very birth (Svatah-siddha), perfect through spiritual disciplines (Sadhana-siddha), perfect through the grace of the teacher (kripa-siddha), and made perfect all of a sudden (hathat-siddha).

Disciple: What is the meaning of 'made perfect all of a sudden'?

Mother: It is like becoming wealthy suddenly by inheriting the riches of another.

Just then Nalini, the Mother's niece, entered the room after a bath in the Ganges. Finding the water-closet a little dirty, she had washed it with a few

pots of water, and hence had taken bath in the Ganges for purification. The disciple and the Mother opined that she need have bathed under the tap alone.

Nalini: How is that enough? A water-closet!

Mother: I too had to purify myself for coming into contact with filth on several occasions. But I only chanted the Name of Govinda a few times and felt pure. The mind is everything. It is in the mind alone that one feels pure and impure. A man, first of all, must make his own mind guilty and then alone he can see another man's guilt. Does anything ever happen to another if you enumerate his faults? It only injures you. This has been my attitude from my childhood. Hence I can't see anybody's faults. If a man does a trifle for me, I try to remember him even for that. To see the faults of others! One should never do it. I never do so. Forgiveness is tapasya (austerity).

Disciple: Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) used to say, "Suppose a thief entered the house and stole something. The idea of a thief would flash in your mind. But a baby has no such idea. Therefore it would not see anyone as a thief."

Mother: That's true, indeed. He who has a pure mind sees everything pure.

One could be born with a pure mind if one had performed many austerities and spiritual practices in a previous birth.

Disciple: Mother, my mind does not feel joy in doing Japa or spiritual practices.

Mother: (smiling) Why? Not a little even?

Disciple: Oh, I do a little rather half-heartedly. The next moment I think, "What is the use of mumbling? Let me rather try meditation."

Mother: Can you meditate?

Disciple: No, I cannot do even that. I understand everything but I cannot practise it at all and get peace. One may know the road to Dakshineswar very well, but can one walk all the way?

Lalit Babu entered the room and saluted the Mother. They became engaged in conversation, the disciple joining in it now and then.

Mother: The Master used to say, "The way is extremely difficult, like the sharp edge of a razor." (After a little pause) But he has kept you in His arms. He is looking after you.

Lalit: The Master will take us in his arms after death; is there anything great in that? If he would only do so while we are in this body!

Mother: He is holding you in his arms even in this body. He is above your head. Truly he is holding you.

Disciple: Does he really hold us? Are you telling the truth?

Mother: (firmly) Yes, really, truly.

The Mother finished the morning worship and distributed Prasada in Sal leaves to the devotees. Then she swept the room. As she took the dirt in her hand, a pin entered her little finger. The finger bled and the Mother suffered terribly from pain. As soon as the disciple heard about it he ran upstairs. Someone asked him to apply hot lime. That greatly relieved the pain. The Mother said affectionately, "My child, you are my own. Truly you all are my very own."

16th August, 1912 (Evening)

Mother: When I was thirteen it was time for me to go to Kamarpukur and I went there. The Master was then at Dakshineswar. After a stay of a month or so at Kamarpukur, I returned to Jayrambati. Five or six months later, I again went to Kamarpukur and stayed for nearly six weeks. The Master was still at Dakshineswar, but his elder brother, my sister-in-law and others were then at Kamarpukur. When the Master came to Kamarpukur with the Bhairavi Brahmani (in the year 1867), he sent for me. I went to Kamarpukur, and this time stayed for nearly three months. The Brahmani went to see Jayrambati, Sihar and other places. One day she had a tiff with Hriday over a matter concerning the removal of the leaf-plate of Chinu (Srinivas) Sankhari.

Disciple: Was Chinu Sankhari alive then?

Mother: Yes. He was alive, but had become disabled due to old age.

Disciple: In some books one gets the impression that Chinu had died during the Master's boyhood itself.

Mother: He passed away much later. The Brahmani said, "Chinu is a devotee of the Lord. What harm is there in my cleaning the place where he has taken food?" Hriday was annoyed at this, and said,' "What? Will you really do such a thing? Then we won't allow you to remain inside the house." The Brahmani was not the person to yield to threats. She replied, "What harm if you don't? Manasa will go to bed in Sitala's room!" Hriday rejoined, "Well, let us see how Manasa will sleep in Sitala's room!"

All this raked up a great quarrel between the two. Hriday hurled something at her which struck her on the ears which started bleeding. The Brahmani began to weep. The Master said, "O Hridu! What have you done? She is a holy person, a devotee of God. Your quarrel may attract all the people around and a scandal may ensue!"

Then one day, the Brahmani saw the Master in an ecstatic mood and curiously enough, some sort of fear seized her. Looking up, she began saying, "Oh, Where shall I go? What shall I do? Shall I go to Puri or Vrindaban?" and so on. She disappeared some days later without anybody's knowledge. None could know where' she had gone. She did not return.

Before her departure, one day the Brahmani made garlands of various flowers, smeared them with sandal-paste, and adorned the Master as Sri Gauranga. The Master entered into an ecstasy. She then sent for me. No sooner had I come, than the Master asked, "How does it look?" I somehow managed to say, "Fine", and came away after a hurried prostration. His state of divine inebriation had frightened me.

After this I returned to Jayrambati. The village people were saying all sorts of things about the Master—that he was insane, had gone fully mad, was wandering about naked, and so on. None could, understand then the state of his mind. When all people talked thus, I told myself, 'Let me go and see him'. An opportunity soon came. Many women of the neighbourhood were going to Calcutta for the holy dip in the Ganga on an auspicious day which was near at hand. I told a friend, "I shall go to Dakshineswar to see him,"

and she communicated everything to my father. I, of course, could not speak of this to my father, because of fear and bashfulness.

My father said, "Does she want to go? Very good." He too accompanied us. On the way, I fell ill. I was lying unconscious owing to fever. Just then I saw a woman, jet black in complexion, sitting by my side, and stroking my head. She said, "I come from Dakshineswar." I said, "I too am going to Dakshineswar. But how are you related to us?" She replied, "I am your sister. Don't you worry! You will recover soon."

The very next day, the fever left me. My father got me a palanquin. We reached Dakshineswar at about 9 p.m. I went straight to the Master's room, while the others went to the Nahabat where my mother-in-law stayed. The Master said to me, "Ah! You have come'!" And he asked someone to spread a mat on the floor. Then he added, "Alas! Would that my Mathur were alive now! By his death, my right hand, as it were, is broken!" Mathur had died a few months before. Akshay (the son of the Master's elder brother) had also passed away.

Disciple: Oh! Wasn't Mathur Babu there?

Mother: No. He had passed away about 7 or 8 months earlier. Had Mathur been alive, would I have been put up in that tiny inconvenient room (in the Nahabat)? He would have built a mansion for me!

After seeing the Master, I wanted to go to the Nahabat. But the Master said, "No, no. Stay here. It would be inconvenient for the doctor to see you there." I spent the night in his room. A woman companion slept beside me. Hriday gave us two or three baskets of puffed rice, for all had finished their supper when we arrived.

The next day, a doctor came and examined me. After a few days I became well, and went to stay in the Nahabat. My mother-in-law too was then staying there. Before that she had been living in a room in the bungalow used by the owners of the temple garden. Akshay had breathed his last there. Therefore she had come away from that place, saying, "I shall not stay there any longer. I shall live in the Nahabat, and pass my days looking at the Ganga. I do not need the bungalow any more."

The Master performed the Shodasi Puja about a month and a half after my arrival at Dakshineswar (probably on the night of the Phalaharini Kali Puja, June, 1872). I had then commenced my sixteenth year. At about nine at night, he sent for me. Hriday had made all the necessary arrangements for the worship. The Master asked me to be seated. I sat on the stool facing the jar of Ganga water which used to be kept at the north-western corner of the room. The Master sat near the western door and was facing eastward. All the doors were closed. The articles for worship were on my right.

Disciple: How did he worship?

Mother: I soon became semi-conscious due to spiritual fervour. Hence I do not know how exactly the worship proceeded.

Disciple: What did you do when you became conscious?

Mother: I saluted the Master mentally and came away.

Disciple: It was the night of the (Phalaharini) Kali Puja. There must have been many people present. Did none come to I know about the worship?

Mother: Did I not say that the doors were all closed? The Kali Temple was full of festivities that night. All were busy with that. And besides, what business had they with the Master? Nothing beyond seeing him and saluting him!

Disciple: Was anyone else present at the time of worship?

Mother: A boy named Dinu, from Mukundapur, a distant nephew of the Master used to stay with him. The Master loved the boy very much. He had picked the flowers and the Bilva leaves for the worship. Hriday had made all the other arrangements. There was nobody except the Master when the actual worship began. At the close of it, Hriday came in.

Ram Babu has mentioned in his book that the Shodasi Puja took place at Jayrambati. Ah me! People in that part of the country are so gossipy. As it is, they used to comment, "To whom have you given the girl in marriage? A crazy, insane man!" Now imagine what would have been the consequences of worshipping a woman there!

After the worship, I continued to stay at Dakshineswar for a year. Then I fell ill and returned to Jayrambati. At Dakshineswar, Sambhu Babu (Sambhunath Mallick) had arranged for my treatment by the physician Prasad Babu.

Disciple: .Were you at Dakshineswar when the Master's mother passed away (27th February, 1875)?

Mother: No, I was ill at Jayrambati then. I had returned after suffering for a year at Dakshineswar. For treatment of the spleen trouble, I went to the Siva temple at Badanganj where it was singed.

After I had visited Dakshineswar twice or thrice, Captain (Viswanath Upadhyay) gave Sal wood. Sambhu Babu constructed a cottage for me near the place where now Ramlal stays. At night, a high tide in the Ganga carried away one of the logs. Hriday scolded me saying, "You are ill-starred!" and so on. The Captain, unmindful of the loss, sent another log.

I stayed in that cottage for some days. During the monsoon, once the Master came to this cottage. It rained so heavily that he was unable to return to his room that night. He finished his meal there and laid himself down for the night. He said to me jokingly, "This is as though I have come home, like any other priest of the Kali Temple going home at night!"

An aged woman from Banaras at last persuaded me to come to the room in the Nahabat. The Master was suffering then from a severe attack of dysentery. I began attending on him. I searched in vain for this woman when I visited Banaras.

The next time my mother, Lakshmi, myself and some others, went to Dakshineswar. I made a votive offering of my hair and nails at Tarakeswar for recovery from my last ailment. As (my brother) Prasanna was with us, we first went to his rented house in Calcutta. It was perhaps in the month of March (Year 1881). Next day we all went to Dakshineswar. No sooner were we there than Hriday, for reasons best known to him, began saying, "Why have they come? What have they got to do here?" He was discourteous to them. My mother kept silent. Hriday hailed from the village Sihar, and my mother too was born and brought up there. So he utterly ignored my mother. She said, "Come, let us go back home. With whom shall I leave my daughter

here?" For fear of Hriday, the Master kept mum all through. We all left that very day. Ramlal called a boat for crossing the river.

At the time of departure, 'I mentally prayed to the Mother Kali, "Mother, I shall come here again only if You deign to bring me back." Hriday had to leave the Kali Temple for worshipping the daughter of Trailokya (son of Mathurbabu) placing flowers at her feet (June, 1881).

Ramlal became the permanent priest of the Kali Temple. That turned his head! He was elated with the thought, "How grand! I am now the priest of Mother Kali!", and began to neglect the Master. The Master would be lying down somewhere in an ecstatic mood, and -, his food would remain uneaten. It would finally become stale and dry up. There was no one else at the Kali Temple to look after him, so the Master suffered much. He began to send word for me through people coming to those parts, to rejoin him at Dakshineswar.

Through Lakshman Pyne of Kamarpukur, he sent the message, "I am suffering here. After becoming a priest, Ramlal has joined the group of other priests of the Temple. He does not now look after me much. You must come. Take a litter or a palanquin. I shall bear the cost—be it ten rupees or twenty." Hearing this earnest call, at last I came to Dakshineswar (in February or March, 1882). I was coming after a lapse of a year.

Disciple: Where was the Master when Rani Rasmani passed away?

Mother: He was at Dakshineswar then. I heard from him, as also from some others, that at the time of Rasmani's death, suddenly the lamps in the Kali Temple at the Kalighat got blown out, and the Mother revealed Herself to Rasmani. All her relatives too passed away at the Kalighat residence, with the exception of Mathur Babu, who breathed his last at Janbazar.

BELUR MATH
16th October, 1912, (Wednesday)

It was the time of the Durga Puja. That day was the day of Bodhan. The Mother was expected at the Math in the evening.

Evening was advancing and yet there was no sign of her coming. At this delay, Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda) became restless. At the gate

he saw that the plantain trees and sacred pitchers had not been arranged as yet, and he said, "These things have not been done as yet; how can the Mother come?"

No sooner was the Bodhan ceremony concluded, than the Mother's carriage reached Belur Math. When the carriage stopped, Golap-Ma carefully helped the Mother out of it. The Mother then looked around with beaming eyes and said, "Everything is arranged spick and span. It is as though we ourselves have come attired like the goddess Durga!"

The Mother and the women devotees were accommodated in a bungalow north of the Math premises. The Mother stayed in the southern room of that bungalow. On the day of the Mahashtami, more than three hundred devotees bowed down before the Mother, one by one. She was sitting on her cot facing west. Three or four persons were initiated by her that day.

In the evening, during the course of a conversation, the topic of Girish Babu's sister came up. She had all of a sudden passed away on the night of the Bodhan. The Mother said, "Human being-today he is, tomorrow he is not. No one will accompany a person after his death. Only his actions—good and bad—follow him; even after death."

A boy had received from the Master the sacred Mantra in a dream. He had approached the Mother for guidance. Referring to him, the Mother said, "The Master took that Brahmin boy on his lap and gave him the Mantra."

Disciple: Did you give him a Mantra again?

Mother: No. I told him, "You are favoured by the grace of the Lord Himself. You will attain everything by the repetition of that Mantra," I did not even ask him what the Mantra was. I merely explained to him the technique of repetition.

On the day of the Vijaya Dasami, when the image was being taken away on a boat for immersion in the Ganga, Dr.Kanjilal had danced, gesticulated, and made faces at the image like a child, that had sent all roaring with laughter. One Brahmacharin, who held puritanical views, was much annoyed at those gestures and postures. The Mother was watching the whole scene from her residence and enjoying it. Later I told the Mother about the critical reaction

of .the Brahmacharin. She said, "No, no! It is perfectly all right. The Goddess has to be entertained in every way through music, fun and frolic."

The Mother returned to the Udbodhan on the next day, and after staying for a few days there, she left for Banaras.

Part 6: Conversations (Recorded by Swami Arupananda)

BANARAS
5th November 1912 (Tuesday)

The Mother arrived at the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama at Banaras around 1 p.m. After sometime she went to the new residence of Kiran Babu which was very near the Ashrama. The wide verandah of the house pleased the Mother arid she remarked, "We are indeed fortunate. A narrow place makes the mind narrow, while a commodious place expands it."

The Mother stayed on the first floor with Golap-Ma, Master Mahasaya's wife and some women devotees. Swami Prajnananda and all of us stayed below.

The very next day the Mother went in a palanquin to the shrines of Viswanath and Annapurna. On the day following Kali Puja (November 9) she visited the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, also known as the Sevashrama. Swami Brahmananda, Swami Turiyananda, Charu Babu (Swami Shubhananda), Dr. Kanjilal and others were present. Kedar Baba (Swami Achalananda) accompanied her palanquin and showed her round the wards of the hospital.

When she had seen every department, she sat down and expressed to Kedar Baba her delight at all the buildings and gardens she had seen and the good management she had noticed. She further added, "The Master himself is present here, and the Mother Lakshmi is here in all Her splendour!"

She was curious to know how the institution had taken shape and with whom the idea had first originated. Kedar Baba referred to the zealous efforts and perseverance of Charu Babu and others. Swami Brahmananda told her about the efforts, enthusiasm and the hard work of Kedar Baba for this institution. The Mother was much pleased. She remarked, "The place is so beautiful; I feel like staying on in Banaras."

Soon after she had reached her residence, a devotee came to the Sevashrama with a ten-rupee note and handing it over to the Head, said, "Kindly accept these ten rupees as the Mother's donation to the Sevashrama"

On December 14th, the Mother visited the shrines of various gods and goddesses of Banaras. After her visit to the Temple of Vaidyanath and Tilabhandeswar, she said that the Siva image there was Svayambhu. A little after dusk, she visited the Kedarnath Temple, and attended the evening service there, after having a look at the holy Ganga. About Kedarnath, she said, "This Kedar and the Kedar in the Himalayas are identical—they are connected. If you see this, it is as good as seeing that. The Deity here is a living Presence!"

One day the Mother visited Sarnath. When she saw some foreigners observing with evident astonishment the Buddhist ruins there, she said, "These are the very people who built these things in their previous birth. Now they have come again, and are amazed at their own doings!"

At the time of returning, Swami Brahmananda sent the Holy Mother in his own carriage. The Mother could not be persuaded at first. She said, "No, no. Rakhal and others came in that one, and they will ride back in it. I have no difficulty in travelling in this one." But she complied at last. No sooner was her carriage out of sight, than the horse of the carriage in which the Swami was travelling, ran amuck and landed in a road-side ditch along with the carriage. The Swami was seriously injured.

On hearing of this incident, the Mother said, "The accident was really in store for me, but Rakhal quietly diverted it upon himself. Otherwise with so many young ones (Radhu, Bhudev and others) in my carriage, who knows what would have happened to them?"

The Mother visited two holy men this time at Banaras—one of them was a follower of Guru Nanak, and the other was Chameli Puri When Golap-Ma inquired of Chameli Puri, "Who arranges for your food?", the grand old monk replied with great faith and earnestness, "It is the Mother Durga alone who does. Who else would?" This reply pleased the Mother immensely.

Returning home in the evening, she said to us, "Ah! The old man's face comes to my mind—it is just like a child's!" The next day she sent him some oranges, sweets and a blanket. When on a subsequent day: I asked her if she would visit some more holy men, she said, "What, more holy men have I to see? I have seen that holy man. Which other holy man is here?"

One day some local women-folk came to visit the Mother. They found her very busy with Radhu, Bhudev and other children, and asking Golap-Ma to mend her torn cloth. One of them could not help blurting out, "Mother, I see you terribly entangled in Maya!" The Mother replied in an undertone, "What to do, dear, for I myself am Maya!"

Another day there came three or four women to meet her. The Mother was then seated on one side of the verandah, while Golap-Ma and others sat on the other. Seeing Golap-Ma, who appeared older and possessed an imposing personality, one of the visitors mistook her for the Holy Mother and saluted her. As she was about to say something, Golap-Ma saw the mistake and said, "There sits the Holy Mother." Seeing the simple appearance of the Holy Mother, she thought that the "Holy Mother" (actually Golap-Ma) was just making fun. But when Golap-Ma repeated what she had said, the woman went towards the Holy Mother to salute her. The Mother too smilingly said, "No, no. She indeed is the Holy Mother!"'

The woman was now in a fix! Golap- Ma and the Mother, both were pointing to each other saying-"There! She is the Holy Mother!" We were watching all this fun. Finally, the woman adjudged Golap-Ma to be the 'real' Holy Mother, and again advanced towards her. Now Golap-Ma rebuked her, saying, "Have you no sense of judgement at all? Don't you notice the difference between a human face and a divine face? Does any human being appear like that?"

The Mother indeed possessed something unique in her simple and gracious appearance which truly made one feel her uncommon nature.

BANARAS

Kiran Babu's House. Morning.

Disciple: All the pilgrims touch the image of Visvanatha (Siva). Therefore it is bathed in the evening. Afterwards the priests worship the Deity and give the food-offering.

Mother: The priests allow people to touch the image out of greed for money. Why should they do so? It is enough to see the image from a distance. Otherwise people of immoral character would touch the image.

There are some people whose very touch creates a burning sensation in the body. It is so painful. Therefore I wash my hands and feet after they touch me. Fortunately the rush of people here is less than in Calcutta.

Disciple: One can see you here only after obtaining the permission of the senior" Swamis. This arrangement has been made in order to lessen the rush.

Mother: Who cares to hold court, as it were, at different places?

Her lunatic sister-in-law tormented her even in Banaras. Referring to this she said: "Perhaps I worshipped Siva with Bilva leaves having thorns. Therefore I have this thorn in my life in the shape of this sister-in-law."

Disciple: How is that? What's the harm in offering thorny Bilva leaves to Siva unknowingly?

Mother: No, no. It is extremely difficult to worship Siva. It harms a person even if he makes a mistake unconsciously. But the fact is that those who are having their last birth suffer from the effects of past Karma in this one.

I do not remember having committed any sin since my very birth. I touched the Master at the age of five. I might not have understood him at that time, but he undoubtedly touched me. Why should I suffer so much? By touching him others are being freed from Maya; why should I alone have so much entanglement? Day and night, my mind wants to soar high. I force it down out of compassion for people. And yet I am so tormented!

Disciple: Let them do whatever they like. Please bear with us all. A person cannot be angry so long as he is conscious of himself.

Mother: Right you are, my child. There is no other virtue higher than forbearance. This is a body of flesh and blood. Sometimes I may say something in a fit of anger.

Then the Mother added, saying to herself, "He who warns in time is a true friend. What's the use of saying 'Ah!', when the right time has passed?"

11th December, 1912

The Holy Mother, while in Banaras, used to listen to the reading of the Kasi Khanda. One evening, after the reading of the book, she was engaged in conversation with the disciple.

Disciple: Do all that die in Banaras gain liberation?

Mother: The Scriptures say, "Yes."

Disciple: What is your direct experience? The Master saw that Siva Himself whispers the holy Mantra (Taraka-Brahma) into the ears of the dead.

Mother: I don't know about it, my child; I have not seen anything of this kind.

Disciple: I cannot believe unless I hear something from you on this point.

Mother: Well, I shall tell the Master, R - does not want to believe. Please show me something about it."

I referred to the destruction of temples in many places in India during the Mussalman rule and said, "There was so much oppression. What did God do to prevent it?"

Mother: God has infinite patience. People worship Siva by pouring water in jugs over His head day and night. Does it affect Him in the least? Or they worship Him, covering the image with dry clothes. Does it trouble Him at all? God's patience knows no limit.

The following morning the Holy Mother said to Khagen Maharaj, "Yesterday night I lay awake on my bed when I suddenly saw the image of Narayana of the Seth's temple of Brindavan standing by my side. The garland of flowers round the neck of the Deity hung up to the feet. The Master stood with folded hands in front of the image. I thought, 'How could the Master come here?' I said, 'R- does not want to believe.' The Master said, 'He must. This is all true.' He meant that one dying in Banaras does gain liberation. That Narayana image told me two things. One was: 'Can one ever get the knowledge of Reality unless one knows the truth about God?' The other thing I do not recall."

Khagen Maharaj: Why did the Master stand with folded hands before the image of Narayana?

Mother: That was his characteristic attitude. He was humble before all.

I called on the Mother in the morning and asked her, referring to the conversation of the previous day: "Please tell me if one dying in Banaras gains liberation. What have you seen?"

Mother: The Scriptures say so. Besides, so many people come here with this faith. What else can happen to him who has taken refuge in the Lord?

Disciple: It is, of course, true that he who has taken refuge in God will be liberated. But take the case of those who have not surrendered themselves to God, who are not His devotees, or who belong to other faiths, - will they also get liberation by dying at Banaras?

Mother: Yes, they too. Banaras is permeated with the spirit of God. All living beings of this place, even the moths and insects, are filled with divine consciousness. Any being that dies here—be it a devotee, an atheist, one belonging to another religion, or even an insect or moth—will surely be liberated.

Disciple: Are you speaking the truth?

Mother: Yes, it is true, indeed. Otherwise how can you explain the glory of the holy place?

Nearby there were some sweets that had been offered to the Lord. A fly, buzzing about, sat on my arm. Pointing to it, I said, "Even this fly?"

Mother: Yes, even that fly. All living beings of this place are filled with the spirit of God. Bhudev wanted to take home two young pigeons that had been caught in the niche over the staircase. I said to him. "No, no; you must not take them away. They are inhabitants of Banaras." The women coming from East Bengal live in the Bangalitola. Have they no love for their homes and properties, friends and relatives? But they all have settled down here in order to breathe their last in Banaras. They have such wisdom. They are without attachment.

Disciple: You see, how spiritual the people of East Bengal are!

Mother: Yes, that's true. People of our district are devoid of spiritual wisdom. Take the case of the father-in-law of Radhu. His family owns a house in Banaras. Still the members of the family are frightened at-the very mention of Banaras. They fancy that they will not die if they cling to their native village. Death, however, moves with us as our shadow.

Disciple: Are you really speaking the truth when you say that one dying here gains liberation?

Mother: (sharply) I cannot swear before you thrice. Swearing once is bad enough. Swearing three times! And that, too, in Banaras!

Disciple: (smiling) Please see that I do not die in Banaras! In that case where shall I be and where will you be? We shall not see each other!

Mother: (smiling) How stupid! He says that he does not want to die in Banaras!

Disciple: Mother, seeing is believing. One believes in a statement when it can be corroborated by direct perception.

Mother: What else shall you do if you do not believe in the words of high-souled men? Is there any other way except the one trodden by sages and seers and other holy men?

Disciple: None, indeed! What else can I do but listen to the seers who have had direct perception? That is why I have put the question to you. I shall let you go only when you have given me a direct reply!

Mother: Does it matter in the least to God whether you believe or not? Even the sage Suka Deva was to Him like a big ant at the most. Infinite is He. How much can you understand of Him? Our Master was a man of direct perception. He saw everything; he knew everything. His words are the words of the Veda. What will you do if you do not believe in his words?

Disciple: The Scriptures differ. Some Scriptures say 'this' and others 'that'. Which shall we accept? That is why I am bothering you.

Mother: That's true, indeed. The almanac makes a forecast of rain. But you do not get a drop by squeezing its pages. Besides, the Scriptures are filled with many useless things also. One cannot observe to the letter the injunctions of the Scriptures. The Master used to say, "The Bhakti hedged round by the Scriptural injunctions hardly justifies the name."

While staying at Kamarpukur after my return from Brindavan, I took off my bracelets for fear of public criticism. In fact, people were already talking about it. I also wished to go for bath in the Ganga, for which I have always had a special devotion. But the river is far away from Kamarpukur.

Now one day I saw, to my great surprise, that the Master was coming towards the house from the direction of Bhuti's canal. He was followed by Naren, Baburam, Rakhal and many other devotees. Further I saw that from his feet sprang a stream of water which flowed in front of him in waves. I said to myself, 'I see he is everything. The Ganges has sprung from his lotus feet!' Quickly I plucked flowers from the side of the Raghuvir temple and offered handfuls of them into the stream. The Master than said to me, "Don't take off the bracelets. Do you know the Vaishnava Tantras?" I said "What are they? I do not know anything about them." Thereupon he said, "Gaurimani (Gauri-Ma) will come here this afternoon. She will tell you about them." That very afternoon Gaurdasi arrived, and learned from her that to a woman her husband is Chinmaya (Pure Spirit).

In this Kali Yuga one attains to God if one simply sticks to truth. The Master used to say, "He who speaks nothing but truth is resting on the lap of God!" During the Master's illness at Dakshineswar, I used to boil and condense milk for him and take to him two pounds of milk saying that it was one. I would not tell him the correct quantity. One day he came to know about it and said, "What is this? Stick to truth. You see, I have bowel complaints on account of my taking a large quantity of milk." Surprisingly enough, that very day he suffered from disorder of the bowels. He had all powers, but it is not so with us.

Disciple: My asking you all these questions or talking in this manner is not really meant for me. I do not worry about myself. I have a different feeling about it. What I want to know is this: I address you as my mother. Are you really my mother?

Mother: Who else am I? Yes, I am your own mother.

Disciple: You may say so. But I do not clearly see this. Naturally and spontaneously I know the mother who gave birth to my body as my own mother. But can I think of you likewise?

Mother: Alas, it is true indeed!

A few moments later, she added, "My child, He alone is our father and mother. He alone has become our father and mother."

16th December, 1912

I raised the topic of “visions” and asked the Mother, "People have various "visions.” Are they subjective or can they be actually seen by one's physical eyes?"

Mother: They are all subjective. But I had seen one actually with these physical eyes. It was at Kamarpukur'. A girl like Radhu (about 11 or 12 years old), wearing ochre clothes, with a string of Rudraksha beads around her neck, her hair all rough and dry, would accompany me wherever I went.

Then I performed the Pancatapa at Nilambar Babu's rented house at Belur. Yogin (Yogin-Ma) too did it. After this the girl disappeared, and I saw her no more.

Disciple: What is the need of Tapasya (austerity)?

Mother: It is very necessary. Look at Yogin. How much does she fast even now? She practises intense austerities. Golap is an adept in Japa. One day Naren's mother came to visit me. Naren said to her, "Perhaps you had practised austerities. Therefore you got Vivekananda as your son. Repeat them and then you may get another."

The Master practised all kinds of disciplines. He used to say, "I have made the mould; now you may cast the image."

Disciple: What is the meaning of casting the image?

Bhudev: It means to meditate on the Master and mould yourself after him.

Mother: Yes, he has understood it. To cast the image means to meditate and contemplate on the Master, to think of the various incidents of his life. By meditating on him, one gets all the spiritual moods. He used to say, "One who remembers me never suffers from want of food or from other physical privations."

Maku: Did he himself say this?

Mother: Yes, these are the very words from his mouth. By remembering him one gets rid of all sufferings. Don't you see that all his devotees are happy? Elsewhere you will not find devotees like those of the Master. Here, in Banaras, I see so many holy men; but can you point out one who is like his devotees?

Disciple: There is a reason for that, Mother. About him we feel as if the market has only just come to a close. All the signs of the market are there. People are still moving about. The devotees and the intimate disciples of the Master are still alive. We feel that the Master, as it were, is very near us. He has not gone away to any great distance. We shall get the response if we but call on him.

Mother: Yes, many people do get it.

Disciple: Krishna, Rama and others seem to belong to a bygone age. They do not seem near enough to respond to our prayer.

Mother: Yes, that is true.

Referring to the Cossipore Garden, I said, "It is a sacred place and now a European gentleman lives there."

Mother: At the Cossipore Garden the Master spent the last days of his life. The place is associated with so much meditation, Samadhi and the practice of austerities. It is the place where the Master entered into Mahasamadhi. It is a place permeated with intense spiritual vibration. One realizes God-consciousness by meditating there. The place may be acquired if the Master commands its owner through dream to hand it over to the Belur Math.

One day at Cossipore, Niranjan (Swami Niranjanananda) and others planned to drink the juice of a date palm. To my astonishment, I saw the Master too

going behind them. When I asked him about this the next day, he said, "Oh! It is all your imagination! Your brain must have been heated by too much cooking!" Vijay Goswami had a vision of the Master at Dacca. He even felt the touch of the Master's body!

After the passing away of the Master, Naren and other youngsters said, "Let us continue to stay here (at the Cossipore Garden house) at least for some days more, to help the Mother get over the shock. If necessary, we will feed her by begging food." But Ramachandra Datta and other older devotees were not willing. They said, "You need not go about begging to feed her," and the house was given up.

I can stay at that place (Udbodhan, Calcutta) only so long as Sarat is there. After him, I do not see anyone who can shoulder my burden. Yogen (Swami Yogananda) was there. And there is Krishnalal too, — calm and quiet — a disciple of Yogen. Sarat can look after me very well. Sarat is my burden-bearer'.

Disciple: Can't Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) do so?

Mother: No. Rakhal is not of that temperament. He can't face troubles physically. He can do so intellectually or through someone. He is of a totally different make-up.

Disciple: What about Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda)?

Mother: No, not even he.

Disciple: How then is he managing the Belur Math?

Mother: That may be. But taking the responsibilities of women! He can at the most make enquiries from a distance.

Then the Mother talked about the disciples of the Master, whereupon the disciple asked her, "Please tell me who these disciples of the Master are. We cannot recognize them."

Mother: What do I know? But it is true that those who had been born with the Master in his previous incarnations have accompanied him this time also.

Disciple: I do not have any such desire as to see a four-handed Deity and the like. I am quite satisfied with what we have.

Mother: That is also the case with me. What shall we gain by these supernatural visions? For us the Master exists- and he is everything.

UDBODHAN
11th February, 1913

Disciple: Mother, Swamiji has initiated so many people with the Mantra and you also have initiated so many. They come and go away, and are not remembered.

Mother: So many people come. Can all be remembered?

When the fire bums do not the moths come? It is like that.

Disciple: They take the Mantra. But what do they get? We find the man remains as he was.

Mother: Power passes through the Mantra-the Guru's goes to the disciple and the disciple's comes to the Guru. That is why the Guru at the time of initiation takes on himself the sins of the disciple and suffers so much from physical maladies. It is extremely difficult to be a Guru, for he has to take the responsibilities for the disciple's sins. If the disciple commits a sin, that affects the Guru too. On the other hand, the Guru is benefited if the disciple is good. Some disciples make quick progress, and some do it slowly. It depends on the tendencies of the mind acquired by one's past deeds. That is why Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) hesitates about giving initiation. He said to me, "Mother, as soon as I initiate a disciple, I fall ill. The very idea of giving initiation makes me feel feverish."

One Swami sent a boy to the Holy Mother for initiation. She heard all details from him and said, "You have your own hereditary Vaishnava Gurus. Take initiation from them." Whatever may be the reason, the Mother did not initiate him.

After supper I went to bring a betel roll. The Holy Mother was tying the mosquito curtains for the children in the next room. I heard her speaking to the mad aunt, "Don't take me for an ordinary mortal. You abuse me so

recklessly. I do not take it to heart, considering it only as so much noise. If I take notice of it, who will save you? It is to your advantage that I am alive. Your daughter is yours only. I am here only until she grows up. Otherwise what is attachment for me? I can cut it off this moment. When I pass away one day like camphor, you will never get a trace of me."

Mad aunt: When did I scold you? I just said a few words. The trouble is when-you give, you give without reserve.

She was of the opinion that the Holy Mother should keep all her money for Radhu.

Mother: Mine is a child-like nature. Do I keep meticulous accounts? I give to whoever asks.

Returning from Banaras, the Holy Mother stayed a few days at Calcutta and then left for Jayrambati. On 25th February she reached Koalpara. She was given the room next to the shrine. I brought out a banyan seed and said, "See, Mother, this seed is smaller than the seed of red spinach. And yet from this comes such a huge tree! What a wonder!" She replied, "Why not? Just see, how small is the Bija (mystic syllable) of the Lord's Name. Yet from that, springs forth in due time spiritual consciousness, devotion, love and what not!"

We came to Jayrambati and sat for meal at night. Someone said, "Mother, did you notice how inconsiderate these people (the Mother's brothers) are? They knew of your coming. Yet, they did not send anyone to receive you at the river-crossing." Thereupon the Mother said to the eldest brother (Prasanna): "Why did you not send a man to help me cross the river? My children (referring to the disciples) accompanied me. You did not go yourself, nor did you send a man."

The brother replied, "I did not do so for fear of Kali (the next brother.) He might complain that I was trying to win you over to my side. Do I not know what you are and what these devotees are? I know everything, but I am helpless. Please bless me that I may have you as my sister in my future births also. I do not want anything else."

Mother: Do you think that I shall be born again in your family? I have had enough of it this time. Sri Rama once prayed, "Never may I be born again in

the womb of Kausalya!" And to be born in your family again! Our father was a devotee of Rama and always helped others; our mother too had such a kind heart. That is why I was born in this family.

One day Uncle Prasanna came to the Mother and said, "Sister, I hear that you appeared to someone in a dream and initiated him. You also told him that he would be liberated. You have brought us up from our childhood, and shall we remain just as we are?"

In reply, the Mother said, "The Master's will shall prevail. And look here, Sri Krishna was so intimate with the shepherd boys. He played with them, laughed and wandered with them, and shared their food; but did they know who he really was?"

One day some of the devotees were about to clean the place where they had just finished their meals. The Mother prevented them saying, "No, no. Please don't do all that. You are all precious jewels of the Lord." When the devotees insisted on going ahead with it, the Mother said, "There is a person appointed for that work. The maid will do it."

JAYRAMBATI
14th March, 1913

Dr. Lalit of Shyambazar and Prabodh Babu arrived. At about four o'clock in the afternoon they came to the Holy Mother and saluted her. The following conversation took place.

Lalit Babu: Mother, what rules and regulations should one observe regarding food?

Mother: One should not eat the food given at funeral obsequies (Sraddha ceremony). It does harm to devotional life. Sri Ramakrishna used to forbid it. Besides, first offer to God whatever you eat. One must not eat unoffered food. As your food is, so will be your blood. From pure food you get pure blood, pure mind and strength. Pure mind begets ecstatic love (Prema Bhakti)

Lalit Babu: Mother, we are householders. What shall we do at the Sraddha ceremony of our relatives?

Mother: Supervise the ceremony and give help to your relatives so that they may not be offended; but try somehow to avoid taking meals on that day. If you cannot do that, then on the day of the Sraddha ceremony eat what is offered t6 Vishnu or other gods. The devotees can partake of the food of the Sraddha ceremony if it is offered to God.

Lalit Babu: Many a time there remains an excess of unused food-stuff procured for the Sraddha ceremony. Can one cook and eat that?

Mother: Yes, you can. That will not injure you, my child. A householder cannot help it.

Prabodh Babu: Mother, the Master loved renunciation, but how little we practise it!

Mother: Yes, you will acquire it slowly. You make some progress in this life, a little more in the next and so on. It is the body alone that changes, the Atman always remains the same. Renunciation of 'lust' and' gold'!

The Master used to say, "I can change Kamarpukur into gold, if I so desire, by requesting Mathur Babu to do so; but what good will that do? It is all transitory." Regarding some devotees, the Master used to say that it was their last birth. He would remark, referring to some devotee, "You see, he has no desire whatsoever for anything. This is his last birth."

The devotees prostrated themselves before the Mother and took leave of her.

Speaking about the objection of certain people that some of Sri Ramakrishna's Sannyasin disciples, being Sudras, are not entitled for Sannyasa, according to orthodox rules, the Mother said, "The disciples of Sri Ramakrishna are Jnanis and therefore Sannyasins. A Jnani can be a Sannyasin. Take the case of Gaurdasi. A woman cannot be initiated into Sannyasa, but is Gaurdasi a woman? She is more than a man! How many men are there like her? See what she has achieved—built a school, acquired horses, a carriage, and so forth. The Master used to say, 'If a woman embraces Sannyasa, she is certainly not a woman; she is really a man.' He further used to say to Gaurdasi, I am pouring water, you will make the clay.' "

Part 7: Conversations (Recorded by Swami Arupananda)

JAYRAMBATI
28th March, 1913

It was morning. I entered the inner apartment of the Holy Mother's house and found her cutting the Kalmi green. Seeing her cutting something else also along with it, I said, "What is this that you are cutting up with the Kalmi green?" "This is grass;" the Mother said, "this is also a kind of green. The complexion of Krishna was like this grass."

I was seated for the mid-day meal. Radhu's mother arranged a leaf-plate and a cup of water in the verandah of her house for another guest, perhaps one of her relatives. A cat drank a little water out of the cup, so Radhu's mother changed the water. The cat again drank some of the water, and again she changed it. A third time the cat drank, whereupon Radhu's mother chased it and screamed, "You rogue, you burnt-faced cat, I will kill you!" It was the hot season. The Holy Mother was there. She said, "No, no, you must not prevent a thirsty animal from drinking. Besides, the cat has already touched the water." At this Radhu's mother shouted in anger, "You don't have to become compassionate towards the cat. You have shown enough compassion towards man! Why not reserve your kindness for man?"

The Mother said in a serious voice, "He is unfortunate, indeed, who does not gain my compassion. I do not know anyone, not even an insect, for whom I do not feel compassion."

I was seated for the evening meal. The Mother herself had cooked a curry, potatoes and other vegetables. She gave some of them to me and said, "Eat and tell me how you like it."

Disciple: This is patient's diet—cool and bland. Who cooked it?

Mother: I myself.

Disciple: You yourself?

Mother: Yes.

Disciple: Well, it could be done better. It is not exactly to the taste of people of our part of the country.

Mother: You had better taste a little of the liquid portion.

Nalini: O aunt, you never put any red chilly in your curry. Can anybody relish it?

Mother: (to Nalini) Don't listen to him. When you eat it, you will find it tastes good.

Disciple: For some days past I have been asking about the curries you prepare and I have tasted some of them, but they all taste alike.

Mother: Very well, one day I shall cook as they do in your part of the country. You must show me how to cook. I am sure you add a lot of chillies. Don't you?

Disciple: Not so much. But a curry need not necessarily taste bad because it is less pungent.

Mother: (to Nalini) Bring some gram tomorrow. I shall make some soup. I used to cook very well; now I am out of practice. At Kamarpukur, Lakshmi's mother and I used to cook. She could cook very well. One day the Master and Hriday sat for their meals. Referring to a preparation made by Lakshmi's mother, the Master said, "O Hridu, the one who has cooked this may be compared to the physician Ramdas." And tasting the curry prepared by me, he said, "Ah, whoever has cooked this is Srinath Sen." Now Ramdas was a renowned physician while Srinath Sen was only a quack! At this Hriday said, 'What you say is true. But you can get your quack physician at all times to render you all kinds of service, even to massage your feet. Yon have only to send for her and she comes. But physician Ramdas takes a big fee for his visit, and you cannot get him at all hours. Moreover, people at first consult a quack. He is your friend at all times." The Master said, "That's true, that's "' true. She is always available."

JAYRAMBATI
8th May, 1913

Radhu was indisposed, being laid up with pain and fever. Her eccentric mother began to scold the Holy Mother, saying, "You are about to kill my daughter with medicines." As she kept on scolding, she lost all control over her tongue. Uncle Varada was called in. He chased Radhu's mother out of the house. The Holy Mother, too, could bear it no longer. She spoke some sharp words to Radhu's mother.

Addressing us the Mother said, "I was married to one who never addressed me as tui. One day at Dakshineswar, I carried the Master's food to his room. As I was leaving the room, the Master thought that it was his niece Lakshmi, and called out, 'Close the door behind you (tui)'. I said, 'Yes, I am closing it.' Recognizing my voice he was embarrassed and said, 'Ah, it's you! I thought it was Lakshmi. Please don't mind.' That unintentional disrespect upset him so much, that the next morning he came to the Nahabat saying, 'Look here, my dear. The whole of last night I couldn't sleep, worrying how indeed I spoke so rudely to you! And look at this Radhu's mother! How she abuses me day and night! I do not know what sin I committed to deserve all this. Perhaps I worshipped Siva with a thorny Bilva leaf. That thorn has now become this thorn — this Radhu's mother."

JAYRAMBATI
12th May, 1913

Referring to Radhu's illness, the Mother said, "My mind now does not dwell upon Radhu even in the slightest degree. I am sick of her illness. I force my mind upon her. I pray to the Master, saying 'O Lord, please divert my mind a little to Radhu. Otherwise who will look after her?' I have never seen such illness. Perhaps in her former birth she died of an illness for which she had not performed any penance. I have in mind to do these two things—one, to invoke the help of a Canda (a fierce spirit) through adequate rites, and the other, to undertake the Candrayana vow.

"Whenever the Master experienced Mahabhava, he used to experience excruciating burning sensation in his chest. You must have read all about it in the books. My brother-in-law then brought him to the village-home. He called in a few exorcists, and with their help a Canda was invoked. He addressed the Master by his childhood name and said, 'O so-and-so (Gadai), your state of Mahabhava is due to the grace of God. It is not a disease. Do not eat too much betel-nut. It increases lust.' If a man dies for a particular

illness without doing the necessary penance, he gets the same illness in his next birth; but this rule does not apply to a holy man."

Kedar's mother: The monk dies repeating the Name of God and therefore he attains to God.

Mother: Yes, that's true. The other day a young man died at Koalpara. Will he be reborn? No. That was his last birth.

At the time of his illness at Cossipore, the Master once remarked, "I am ill. The officers of the Kali temple may criticize me for not performing any penance." Then to Ramlal he said, "Take these ten rupees and go to Dakshineswar. Offer the money to Mother Kali and distribute it among the Brahmanas and others."

A Sadhu is not entitled to perform any ritual. Therefore the Master asked Ramlal to offer the money to his Chosen Deity and later on distribute it among the Brahmanas and others. In ancient times the hermits and Rishis used to live in the forest. Could they perform penances like the Candrayana? They used to offer only fruits and roots to their Chosen Ideal and later on distribute them among the needy. That was enough for them.

Radhu's Mother: My aunt died of a certain illness. Do you mean to say she has been born again with that illness?

Mother: Do you think that your aunt has not been reborn? Certainly she has again taken birth and inherited that illness as well. Many a time a man born in a particular family takes birth and dies again and again in the same family as a result of his Karma.

JAYRAMBATI (Mother's old House)
8th June, 1913

Surendranath Bhaumick and Dr. Durgapada Ghosh had been staying at the house of the Holy Mother. They were to leave that afternoon. In the morning, after their bath, they came to the Mother and saluted her. She blessed them by placing her hand on their heads and asked them to take their seats. After the exchange of a word or two, Surendra said to the Holy Mother, "Mother, while worshipping the Master I find one difficulty. Suppose a devotee has a general belief that his Ishta Devata and the Master

are one and the same. He worships the Goddess through the image of the Master. Afterwards he surrenders the fruits of the Japa to the image of the Master, uttering the words, tvat prasadat maheshvari— 'O Great-Goddess, through Thy grace,' and so forth. This creates confusion in my mind."

The Mother said with a smile, "Don't worry, my child. Our Master alone is Maheshvara (Supreme God) and Maheshvari (Supreme Goddess) as well. He alone is the embodiment of all Deities. He alone is the embodiment of all mystic syllables. One can worship through him all Gods and Goddesses. You can address him as Maheshvara as well as Maheshvari.

Surendra: Mother, I cannot concentrate my mind in meditation at all.

Mother: It does not matter much. It will be enough if you look at the picture of the Master. The Master was ill at Cossipore. The young disciples used to attend on him by turn. Gopal also was there. One day instead of serving the Master, he went for meditation. He meditated for a long time. When Girish Babu heard of it, he remarked, "The one upon whom he is meditating with closed eyes is suffering on a sick-bed, and fancy, he is meditating upon him!" Gopal was sent for. The Master asked him to stroke his legs. He said to him, "Do you think I am asking you to stroke my legs because they are aching? Oh, no! In your previous births you did many virtuous acts; therefore I am accepting your service." Look at the picture of the Master and that will be enough.

Surendra: Mother, I do not succeed in regularly counting the beads three times a day.

Mother: Even if you don't, try to remember the Master always and perform your Japa whenever you can; at least you can salute him mentally, can't you?
'

Durgapada: Mother, I do not quite understand what rules one should observe regarding one's food.

Mother: The Master was very particular about one thing in regard to food. He used to forbid all the devotees from eating the food of the Sraddha ceremony. He used to say it affected one's devotion. Apart from this you may eat what you like, but remember the Master when you do so.

Durgapada: Mother, while performing my duties in the hospital, many a time I feel thirsty. I feel compelled to drink water, without consideration for place and persons. As a matter of fact, I do so. What do you say to that, Mother?

Mother: What else can you do? You do it in connection with the discharge of your duty. Remember the Master while you drink the water. As you do this while on duty, it will not injure you. Is it ever possible for those who are called upon to perform various odd duties to observe all religious injunctions regarding food?

Surendra: You see, Mother, we householders live in families with many relations. Sometimes it happens that while the food is being cooked, some members of the family partake of it; later on that food is brought to me. I hesitate to offer that food to God.

Mother: That is inevitable in the case of householders. We also have to face similar situations. Take an instance: there may be a sick person in the family. Part of the food may be kept aside for him. But when food is placed on the plate, remember the Master, think that he himself has given this food, and eat it. Then it will not have any injurious effect on the growth of devotion.

Surendra: Mother, how can I describe to you my mental condition? You are the inner guide. You understand everything. I have been undergoing all possible sufferings for the last few years. But for your blessings I would perhaps have been dead by this time.

Mother: Yes, my child, you do not have to tell me of the sufferings in the life of the world. There is no limit to it. In your case it is inevitable. Look at me, my child. What sort of life I am leading by the will of the Master! How much I am suffering on account of this girl (Radhu)!

Surendra: Yes, Mother, your condition gives us consolation and hope. You yourself know the sufferings of the world; therefore we can expect your compassion.

Mother: Don't be afraid, my child. The Master is ever-present. He alone will protect you, both here and hereafter.

Surendra: Mother, we are living so far away. Are dreams real?

Mother: Yes, they are. Dreams regarding the Master are real, but he forbade his disciples to narrate, even to him, dreams regarding himself.

Surendra: Mother, we do not know what the Master was like. We have not seen him. So for us you are the Master and everything else.

Mother: Don't fear, my child. The Master will look after you. He will watch over you here and hereafter. He will protect you always.

After the meal the two devotees took leave. Uncle Varada accompanied them. He was going to Calcutta. The Mother walked part of the way with them and looked on until they were out of sight.

Surendra was the head-master of a school at Ballaratanganj. Some butchers of that place used to flay cows alive. One day the rogues did so in front of the school. Surendra, the other teachers and the students — Hindus and Mussalmans alike—made a strong protest. The butchers were beaten. This created some trouble. Surendra was threatened by the butchers. At this time two or three students of the school were preparing to leave for Jayrambati for taking initiation. Surendra sent a letter to the Holy Mother through them. The boys also narrated the incident to her. She was extremely shocked and said, "If you do not protest against such action, who will do so?" According to her instruction a letter was written to Surendra giving him assurance and encouragement. Further, he was asked to see that a repetition of such cruel action did not take place. Later on the Mother again wrote to Surendra, saying, "If God really exists, then He shall certainly redress the grievance." Some time later a law-suit was filed, and as a result butchery of that heinous kind was stopped.

JAYRAMBATI
11th June, 1913

It was noon. Along with another, I was taking food on the verandah of the Mother's room.

Mother: Radhu says that this time in the month of Asvin, there will be fierce fighting (maramari). It is written so in the almanac.

Disciple: It is not 'fighting'; but a devastating epidemic (mahamari) is anticipated.

In the course of conversation, the Mother said: "Satya Yuga has begun since the birth of the Master. Many luminaries have accompanied him. Naren was the chief among the Seven Sages (Saptarshi.) Arjuna came as Yogen. How many such great souls can there be? Sour mangoes can be had without number. But fajli (a certain variety) mangoes — can one get so many? Countless ordinary people take birth and die. But only these jewels among men come along with the Incarnation for the sake of His mission.

Disciple: Swamiji also said that with the advent of the Master the Satya Yuga has begun.

Mother: That is so.

JAYRAMBATI
12th June, 1913

At noon the Holy Mother was feeding Radhu. She said while coaxing her to eat, "When the Master was ill, Ganga Prasad Sen of Kumartuly was consulted. The physician prescribed some medicine and forbade him to drink water. The Master began to ask one and all, 'Well, will I be able to live without water?' He asked this question of everyone, even of a five year old child. All replied, 'Yes, sir, of course you can'. 'Can I?' he asked me. 'Of course,' I replied. He then said, 'You should wipe the water from even washed pomegranate seeds. See if you can do it.' In reply I said to him, 'Well, everything will be done by the grace of Mother Kali. We shall try our utmost.' The Master made up his mind at last. He stopped drinking water and took the medicine. Every day I used to give him three to four seers of milk to drink—later I increased it to even five to six seers. The man who milked the temple cows used to give me milk in large quantities. He would say to me, 'If I give all this milk to the temple, the priests will take it home after worship and give it away to anyone and everyone. But if I leave the milk here, the Master will have it.' He used to give me up to five or six seers of milk. He was a good man, full of devotion. I gave him Rasagolla, Sandesh—all kinds of sweets and other things that lay at hand. The devotees used to bring plenty of these. I would boil the milk down to a seer and a half. The Master would ask me, 'How much milk is there?' I would say, 'How much,

indeed? May be 4 or 5 quarters of a seer!' He would remark, 'Perhaps more. I see such thick layer of cream!'

"One day Golap was there. He asked her, 'How much milk is there?' And she told the truth. 'Ah! So much milk!' he exclaimed, 'that is why I get indigestion. Call her, call her!' I came in, and he told me of what Golap had said about the milk. I pacified him telling, 'Oh! Golap does not know the measurement. How can she know how much the pot contains?'

"Another day he asked Golap about the milk and she said in reply, 'One full bowl from here and another from the Kali temple.' At this the Master got nervous again. He sent for me, and began to ask about the exact capacity of the bowl. I replied, 'I do not know all those calculations. You will drink milk. Why all these enquiries about measurement? Who cares for all those calculations?' He was not satisfied. He said, 'Can I digest all this milk? I shall get indigestion.' Really, that day he did get indigestion. He did not take anything that night, except a little sago water.

"Golap said to me afterwards, 'Well, Mother, you should have told me about it before. How could I know? His whole evening meal is spoiled!' In reply I said to her, 'There is no harm in telling a lie for feeding someone. In this way I coax him to eat.' Anyway he picked up his health and was almost cured of his illness."

Disciple: I see that mind alone is everything.

Mother: Exactly. It is mind alone. Indeed, when he was not told, he could consume quite a lot.

At night Vibhuti and I were taking food. I said to Vibhuti, "Would it not be good to get Radhu an amulet for hysteria, from a dependable person?"

Mother: Yes. The priests at the temple of Dharma known by the name 'Swarupa-Narayana‘ give medicines. I have a mind to try it for Radhu. Now I wish to try some supernatural remedies for her. My mother had once recovered from her illness as a result of a consecrated flower from the temple of Swarupa-Narayana Dharma. Since then I have begun to have faith in these things.

Vibhuti: Oh, the priests of Dharma? The Buddhists were distributing medicines, weren't they? The deity Dharma is actually the Lord Buddha.

Mother: We also have a Dharma temple. There it is.

Disciple: I know Dharma is represented by the image of Buddha in all places.

Mother: Here it is known as (Sundara) Narayana, and is of the form of a tortoise.

Vibhuti: The image is like a seat, isn't it, with four heels at the bottom?

Mother: Yes, but slightly raised in the middle.

Vibhuti: That is not a tortoise. It is the seat of Buddha. The state of Buddha is beyond existence and non-existence. There can be no image of His and so they just make a seat for Him.

Mother: That may be. The boys worship our Dharma. There is no set ritual. They give whatever they like. Perhaps one or two red flowers. Whatever is prepared is given. He takes no notice of any faults. He is happy with whatever is given.

Disciple: People often get supernatural remedies for their illnesses. It seems this is not in her (Radhu's) lot.

Mother: When I was ill, my whole body was swollen and the eyes and nose were running incessantly. Umesh (Holy Mother's brother) said, "Sister, Simhavahini is present here. Will you make a vow of fasting before Her?" He persuaded me and almost carried me there. That night of full moon was a dark night for me. I couldn't see anything. Due to incessant watering, my eyes were almost blind. I went and prostrated in front of the Devi. In addition I had diarrhoea. One woman whom I called god-mother lived nearby. She used to grunt loudly now and then, so that I might not be frightened in the dark silent night. I was lying there alone. Just a little later She (Simhavahini) came to my mother, in the form of a blacksmith girl of about Radhu's age, and said, "Go and bring her back. She is so ill and can she be left lying about? Bring her this moment. Use this medicine and she will be all right." Here She advised me, "Crush the gourd flowers with salt

and apply that juice drop by drop in the eyes. You will get well." I took that medicine. The juice of gourd flowers was applied to the eyes drop by drop. And immediately there was such a burning sensation that it cleansed the eyes of all dirt. My eyes got well that very day. The swelling in the body also went down, and I felt very light. Soon I got well. When people asked me about it, I used to reply, "Mother gave me medicine." From then on, the fame of Mother Simhavahini spread. I got the medicine and the world also was blessed. Earlier none knew much of this Mother Deity. My uncle made a vow of fasting before Her. But black ants bit him, and so he could not carry out his vow. She said to my mother in a dream, "Now I am sleeping. Why has he taken the vow now? He is a Brahmana, doesn't he know this? Go, and bring him back." My mother rejoined, "You have said so much, you could have as well given the medicine!"

My mother saw Her once. On one occasion during the village Kali Puja day, Naba Mukherjee, out of rivalry, refused to receive our rice. My mother had made ready rice and other things for the Puja. When he refused to take them from our home, my mother wept all through the night. She thought: "I have made rice for Kali and he has not taken it. Who will eat this rice now? Can anyone eat Kali's rice?" And then in the night she saw Jagaddhatri, red in colour and sitting cross-legged near the door. Then there was only one room, Varada's, in our house. When the Master came, he also would stay in that room. Jagaddhatri raised my mother, patted her and said, "Why are you weeping? I shall take Kali's rice. Why do you worry?" My mother asked, 'Who are you?' Jagaddhatri replied, "I am the Mother of the Universe. I will receive your worship in the form of Jagaddhatri."

Next day my mother said to me, "Look, Sarada, who is that Deity, red in colour and sitting cross-legged? I shall do Jagaddhatri's Puja." She brought about thirteen maunds of paddy from Viswas. It was raining non-stop. My mother said "Oh Mother, how can I worship you, I cannot even dry the paddy!" In the end by Jagaddhatri's grace there was sunshine. The Mother's image had to be dried by fire and painted. Prasanna informed the Master at Dakshineswar of the Puja. He heard and said, "Mother will come. Very good. But weren't you in straitened circumstances, my dear?" Prasanna said "You also will come. I have come to take you." He said, "You go and perform the worship. It will be very beneficial for you all." Thus Jagaddhatri Puja was performed. The whole village was invited. Every expense was met out of that rice. At the time of farewell to Jagaddhatri, my mother whispered in her ear "Mother Jagai, come again next year. All through the year I shall

be making things ready for you." Next year my mother told me, "Look, you give something. My Jagai's worship will be celebrated." I replied, "Oh, such a trouble, I cannot bear. You have performed it once, why bother again?" That night I saw in a dream that three of them arrived—Jagaddhatri and Her two companions, Jaya and Vijaya. I remember it distinctly. They said to me, "Shall we go away then?" "Who are you all?" I asked. One of them said, "I am Jagaddhatri." In reply I said, "No, why should you go? Stay here. I did not ask you to go away."

Since that time I have been going home as far as possible every year at the time of the Jagaddhatri Puja. I used to help in polishing the utensils and to look after other things. Formerly there were not many people in the family. I would go home to cleanse the pots and pans. Later Yogen (Swami Yogananda) got a set of wooden utensils. He said to me, "Mother, you do not have to scour pots and pans any more." He also secured a piece of land to provide for the expenses of the Puja. Ah! My mother was like goddess Lakshmi. Always she used to keep everything well arranged and spick and span. She would say, "Mine is a family of devotees and gods. Perhaps one day my Sarada (Swami Trigunatitananda) will come, Yogen (Swami Yogananda) may come. All this is necessary." Whatever good rice she got, she would process it and keep ready. She would say "As long as I am here, Brahma also is here, Vishnu is here, Jagadamba, Siva and everybody is here. When I go, they also will accompany me. Is it possible for you to take so much trouble? Mine is a family of gods and devotees."

I had a little diarrhoea. Hearing of that the Mother said, "He is disposed to diarrhoea. He had it in Banaras also." I replied "Before going to Banaras, I suffered from it in Calcutta also. This disease is in our family itself. My father and many others died of diarrhoea."

Vibhuti: What of that? What does it matter if one's father died of some particular ailment?

Mother: Yes. What does it matter? Giving examples is not good. One has to suffer for that. Who dies when! Who is father, who is mother! God is everything.

JAYRAMBATI
14th July, 1913

Mukunda and I were seated in the porch of the Mother's house for our midday meal. The Mother was seated in the porch of the adjoining house. Nalini arrived dressed in wet clothes. She had taken her bath, because a crow had 'urinated' on her!

Mother: I am an old woman now, but I have never heard of crows urinating! Your mind is impure. Can the mind lose its purity without great sins? The sister of Krishna Bose had such mania for cleanliness. While bathing in the Ganges she would ask people whether the top of her head was under water. That is an obsession. As a result the mind never feels pure. An impure mind does not easily become pure. The more you emphasize your obsession, the more obsessed you become. It is true of all things.

Disciple: I have seen Mahapurushji (Swami Shivananda) fondle dogs and then go to the shrine room to worship the Master. Perhaps someone would pour a little water in his hand and he would sprinkle a few drops over his face. At that time Ganga water was used for everything.

Mother: It is quite different with them. How pure is their mind! It is the mind of the Saint. They are gods, indeed, who live on the banks of the Ganga. Can anyone but gods live on the banks of the Ganga? Sins committed daily are expiated by ablution in the Ganga.

Nalini: Golap-Ma one day cleaned the toilets in the Udbodhan Office and then dressed fruits for offering in the shrine after merely changing her cloth. I said to her, "What is this, Golap—Didi? Go and bathe in the Ganga." Golap-Ma said to me, "Why don't you do it, if you so desire?"

Mother: How pure is Golap's mind! How high-souled she is! Therefore she does not discriminate so much between pure and impure things. She does not at all bother about rules regarding external purity. This is her last birth. In order to acquire a mind like that you need to be born again in a different body.

Pure air blows for eight miles on both the banks of the Ganga. This air is the embodiment of Narayana. The mind is rendered pure as the result of many austerities. God who is purity itself cannot be attained without spiritual practices.

What else does a man obtain by the realization of God? Does he grow two horns? No, his mind becomes pure, and through such a pure mind one attains knowledge and spiritual awakening.

Disciple: There are devotees who surrender themselves to God fully and do not practise austerities. How do they attain to this state?

Mother: That they surrender themselves to God, that they live placing implicit trust in Him, is their spiritual discipline. Ah! Naren said, "Let me have millions of births, what do I fear?" It is true. Does a man of knowledge ever fear rebirth? He does not commit any sin. It is the ignorant person who is always seized with fear. He alone gets entangled and becomes polluted by sin. For millions of births he suffers from endless miseries, he undergoes infinite pains, and at last he craves for God.

Disciple: Yes, through experience he gets his lessons and then attains knowledge.

Mother: Yes, the calf makes the sound of 'Hamba, Hamba.' It makes the same sound even after drums and other instruments are made from its hide and entrails. At last it goes into the hand of a carder, and then comes the sound 'Tuhu, Tuhu.'

JAYRAMBATI
18th September, 1913

In the course of a letter to a devotee the Mother wrote: "There is no happiness whatever in human birth. The world is verily filled with misery. Happiness here is only a name. He on whom the grace of the Master has fallen, alone knows him to be God Himself. And remember, that is the only happiness."

A Sannyasin disciple had gone to Rishikesh, visiting the Holy Mother at Jayrambati on the way. After a few days he wrote to the Mother, saying, "Mother, once you remarked that I would get the vision of the Master in course of time, but that has not happened as yet:" Hearing the contents of the letter the Mother said to the disciple, "Write to him: 'Sri Ramakrishna has not gone to Rishikesh for your sake or simply because you are there.' He has become a Sannyasin. What else is he to do but call upon God? He will reveal Himself to the devotee when it is His sweet will."

UDBODHAN

A young man, placed in very poor circumstances, had come twice or-thrice for initiation, but could not, unfortunately, succeed owing to the Holy Mother's illness. So he wrote, "Please do not refuse me any more. It is with great difficulty that I go over there. I want to know whether the next time I come, I shall get initiation or not." In reply the Holy Mother said to a disciple, "A person, whoever he may be, must go back, if I am not well. Even if I am well, I cannot invite people for initiation. People get facilities and opportunities according to their past Karma. A person comes here several times, but does not get the opportunity to see me, either because I am ill or for some other reason. It is his bad luck. What can I do? You may say that it means a great deal of expense for him, and everybody does not have money. But a Guru may turn away a person seeking to be a disciple, time after time. He who is really eager for the blessing of the Guru, however, will come to him even by begging. The truth is this: He, who is really anxious to cross the ocean of the world, will somehow break his bonds. No one can entangle him. Financial difficulties, awaiting a reply, the fear of going back with unfulfilled desire—these are mere excuses."

A woman wrote to the Mother, "Mother, I am young in years. My father-in-law and mother-in-law do not allow me to go to you. How can I go against their will? It is my desire to receive your blessing." The Mother asked the disciple to write to her, "Child, you need not come here. Call on the Lord who pervades the entire universe. He will shower His blessings upon you."

UDBODHAN (Prayer Hall) 30th September, 1918

It was morning. The Holy Mother was dressing fruits for the worship. The disciple was reading to her a letter written by a devotee. He had written in such a strain that it seemed as if he were piqued with God. The Mother dictated the reply: "The Master used to say, 'Sages like Suka and Vyasa were at best big ants.' God has this infinite creation. If you do not pray to God, what does it matter to Him? There are many people who do not even think of God. If you do not call on Him, it is your misfortune. Such is the Divine Maya that He has thus made people forget Him. He feels, 'They are quite all right, let them be.' "

Disciple: Mother, it is not that people do not want to see God. Otherwise why should such a question arise in their mind at all? The thing is that they feel greatly hurt that God, whom they like to feel as their very 'own', moves away from them. Buddha, Chaitanya, Jesus Christ and others like them did so much for their devotees in order to insure their welfare.

Mother: That was also the attitude of our Master. It is not possible for me always to recollect all the devotees. I say to the Master, "O Lord, please bless all, wherever they may be. I cannot remember everyone." And see, it is He who is doing everything. Otherwise why should so many people come?

Disciple: That is true, indeed. It is rather easy for men to believe Kali, Durga and other Deities to be God, but is it easy to accept a man as God?

Mother: That depends upon His Grace.

A day later a devotee arrived. The disciple said to the Mother, "Mother, it is this devotee who wrote to you that letter." The Mother said, "Is it so? I see he is a good boy." Then she said to the devotee, "You see, it is the nature of water to flow downwards, but the sun's rays lift it up towards the sky; likewise it is the very nature of the mind to go to lower things, to objects of enjoyment, but the grace of God can make the mind go towards higher objects."

It was about half past ten in the morning. A householder devotee arrived and saluted the Mother. "Mother," said he, "why do I not see the Master?" The Mother said, "Continue to pray without losing heart. Everything will happen in time. For how many cycles did the Munis and Rishis of old practise austerities to realize God, and do you believe you will attain to Him in a flash? If not in this life, you will attain to Him in the next. If not in the next, it will be after that. Is it so easy to realize God? But this time the Master has shown an easy path; therefore it will be possible for all to realize God."

After the devotee left, the Mother said, 'He is so deeply engrossed in worldliness. He is the father of scores of children and still he says, 'Why do I not see the Master?' Many women used to come to the Master. They would say to him, 'Why can't we concentrate our mind upon God? Why can't we steady our mind?' and things like that. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell them, 'You still smell of the lying-in room. First get rid of that smell. Why are you so worried about God-realization now? Everything will happen in course of

time. In this life we have met. In the next we shall again meet and then you will attain to your goal.' It is easy to see a person as long as he lives in the body. I am now living here, so one can see me by merely coming here. How few have the good fortune to see the Master now with physical eyes! Vijay Goswami had seen the Master at Dacca. He felt his body. At that the Master said, 'That my soul goes out is not good; perhaps this body will not last for many more days.'

"Can you tell me who has seen God? He made Naren attain to God-realization. Suka, Vyasa and Siva are like big ants at the most; they had glimpses of Him. One may see a vision in dream, but to see God in a physical form is a matter of rare good fortune.

(Excitedly) "Why can't one meditate if one has a pure mind? Why should one not be able to see God? When a pure soul performs Japa, he feels as if the holy Name bubbles up spontaneously from within himself. He does not make an effort to repeat the Name. One should practise Japa and meditation at regular times, giving up idleness. While living at Dakshineswar I used to get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and practise Japa and meditation. One day I felt a little indisposed and left the bed rather late. The next day I woke up still late through laziness. Gradually I found that I did not feel inclined to get up early at all. Then I said to myself, 'Ah, at last I have fallen a victim to laziness.' Thereupon, I began to force myself to get up early. Gradually I got back my former habit. In such matters one should keep up the practice with unyielding resolution.

"Austerities, worship, pilgrimage, the earning of money— one should do all these in the days of youth. You see, even I had visited so many places at Banaras and Vrindaban on foot in my early years, but now I need a palanquin to go even a few feet. I lean upon others. In old age the body deteriorates. It does not possess any strength. The mind loses its vigour. Is it possible to do anything at that time? It is quite right that the young Sannyasins of our Math have been directing their mind to God from an early age. This is the right time for them to do so. (To the disciple) My child, austerities or worship, practise all these things right now. Will these things be possible later on? Whatever you want to achieve, achieve now; this is the right time."

Disciple: Lucky indeed are those who receive your blessings now. Those who come later on cannot have this rare opportunity.

Mother: What do you mean? Do you mean to say they will not succeed? God exists always everywhere. The Master is always present. They will succeed through his grace. Are not people of other countries making spiritual progress?

Disciple: The mind feels longing when it knows that it is loved, but do you really love us?

Mother: Do I not love you? I love even those who do a little for me, and you are doing so much. Whenever I touch anything at home, I remember you. I often think of those of you who are with me, and as for those who live far away, I say to the Master, "O Lord, please look after them. I cannot always remember them."

UDBODHAN (Prayer Hall)

The Mother was seated on her bedstead. The disciple was reading to her the letters of her devotees. Krishnalal Maharaj was also there. The letters contained such statements as "The mind cannot be concentrated," etc. The Holy Mother listened to these and said in a rather animated voice, "The mind will be steadied if one repeats the Name of God fifteen or twenty thousand times a day. It is truly so. O Krishnalal, I myself have experienced it. Let them practise it first: if they fail, let them complain. One should practise Japa with some devotion, but this is not done. They will not do anything, they will only complain, saying, 'Why do I not succeed?' "

A devotee entered the room and asked the Mother about meditation and Japa. She said, "Repeating the Name of God a fixed number of times, telling the rosary or counting on fingers, is calculated to direct the mind to God. The natural tendency of the mind is to run this way and that way. Through these means it is attracted to God. While repeating the Name of God, if one sees His form and becomes absorbed in Him, one's Japa stops. One gets everything when one succeeds in meditation.

"The mind is by nature restless. Therefore at the outset to make the mind steady, one may practise meditation by regulating the breathing a little. That helps to steady the mind. But one must not overdo it. That heats the brain. You may talk of the vision of God or of meditation, but remember, the mind is everything. One gets everything when the mind becomes steady.

"It is quite natural that man forgets God. Therefore whenever the need arises, God Himself incarnates on earth and shows the path by Himself practising Sadhana. This time He has also shown the example of renunciation."

Section II: Translated by Swami Prabhananda

01: Recorded by Yogin-Ma

Yogindra Mohini Biswas, a disciple of the Great Master, and a life-long companion of the Holy Mother.

SOME days after I had been introduced to Sri Ramakrishna, I paid a visit to Dakshineswar. Learning that, being in a hurry, I had not taken my meal, the Master said, "Ah! You haven't taken your food. Go to the Nahabat and take rice and curry." There at the Nahabat I saw the Holy Mother for the first time. Rama's mother and others had been there once or twice before. At the Nahabat they told the Mother that I had not taken my meal. The Mother promptly served me rice, curry, luchi, and whatever else she had in stock. Even at this, my first meeting with the Holy Mother, I became quite intimate with her. The next time I went to Dakshineswar I found that the Mother was going on a trip to Kamarpukur that very day to attend Ramlal-Dada's marriage. I felt very sad at the thought that I would not see her for many days. The Mother came to salute the Master before leaving on the journey. The Master came to the northern verandah when the Mother took the dust of his feet. The Master said, "Move cautiously. See that you don't leave behind any of your belongings in the boat or railway compartment." I had had the desire to see them together, and that day my desire was fulfilled. The Mother left by boat. As long as it could be seen, I stood gazing at the boat. As soon as the boat was out of sight, I went to the spot in the Nahabat where the Mother used to meditate, and wept bitterly. I sat for meditation facing south on the western verandah. While passing by the Nahabat the Master heard me sobbing and sent for me. When I went to his room, he said, "Have you been deeply grieved at her departure?" Then to console me, as it were, he began to recount the spiritual disciplines he had practised at Dakshineswar. He concluded, saying, "Don't divulge these to anyone." I, a mere housewife, was shy, but on that day I sat quite close to the Master and talked with him. The Mother returned to Dakshineswar after about a year and a half. The Master had written to her, "I am having difficulties regarding my food." On her return the Master said to her, "That girl with big, beautiful eyes loves you dearly. The day you left she wept bitterly, sitting in the Nahabat." The Mother said, "Yes, her name is Yogin."

Whenever I went to Dakshineswar, the Mother used to tell me all that had happened. She sought my advice. I used to braid her hair. She liked so much the way I braided it that she would not undo it at the time of bathing, even after three or four days. She used to say, "No, Yogin braided my hair; f shall unbraid it on the day she comes next." I used to visit the Master every seven or eight days. I would take Bilva leaves from Dakshineswar for worshipping Siva at home. I used to worship Siva with those leaves even when they got dried up. One day the Mother asked, "Yogin, do you worship using dried Bilva leaves?"

Yogin-Ma: Yes, Mother, but how did you know?

Mother: During my meditation this morning I saw you worshipping with dried Bilva leaves.)

One day the Mother was preparing rolls of betel leaf in the Nahabat and I was sitting by her side. I noticed that she prepared some rolls with cardamom and a few others with simply betel and lime. I asked, "Why didn't you add cardamom to these? For whom are these meant and for whom are those?" The Mother replied, "Yogin, these (specially spiced betel rolls) are meant for the devotees; by taking good care of them I have to make them my own. And these (the ones without cardamom) are for the Master; he is already my own."

The Mother had a good musical voice. One night she and Lakshmi-Didi were singing in a low tone. It was very resonant and reached the ear of the Master. The next day he said, "Yesterday you were singing. That's good, very good."

During her stay at Dakshineswar, the Mother couldn't find even a little time for rest. For the devotees who came, she had to make Chapatis out of three to three and a half seers of coarse flour. How many rolls of betel leaves she had to prepare! Then she would boil down the milk meant for the Master; for he was fond of cream. Then soup had to be prepared for him. He used to take his food at the Nahabat as long as his mother lived. After her death, however, he used to dine in his living room. On the days male disciples were not present, the Mother would rub the Master's body with oil before his bath. The Master asked Golap-Didi one day to bring his meals to his room. From that day Golap-Didi carried the Master's meals everyday. Thus the Mother

was deprived of her only opportunity of seeing the Master daily. Golap-Didi used to spend long hours in the evening with the Master, and some days she didn't return to the Nahabat even by ten o'clock. The Mother had to keep an eye on Golap-Didi's food on the verandah of the Nahabat and was, therefore, experiencing inconvenience. One day the Master heard her saying, "Let this food be eaten by a dog or a cat. I can't look after it any more." The next day the Master said to Golap-Didi, "You spend a long time here. That inconveniences her; for she has to keep watch over your food." "No," Golap-Didi said, "The Mother loves me very much and calls me by my first name, as if I were her own daughter." Though Golap-Didi could not understand that the Mother was hurt because she was being prevented from coming to the Master, the latter could understand it.

One day Golap-Didi said to her, "Mother, Manmohan's mother says, 'The Master is a man of such great renunciation and yet, the Holy Mother wears ear-rings and other ornaments. Does it look well?'"

The next morning when I visited Dakshineswar, I noticed that the Mother had only a pair of gold bracelets on her wrists and had taken off all other ornaments. Surprised at this, I asked, "Mother, what's this?" The Mother replied, "Golap said ...."

After much persuasion I succeeded in making her put on the ear-rings and one or two other ordinary ornaments. But she never again put on all the ornaments she had taken off, because just after this the Master fell ill.

When the Mother first came to Dakshineswar she didn't understand much about household problems, and she didn't experience trances either. Though she devotedly practised meditation and Japa every day, we didn't hear of her going into Samadhi. Rather, she even became very frightened and worried at the sight of the Master's Samadhi. For, I heard from her lips that during her first visit to Dakshineswar, the Master had asked her to stay with him at night. In those days the Master and the Mother slept in the same room. The Master used to occupy the larger bed and the Mother the small cot. The Mother would say, "The Master used to pass through spiritual trances and so I couldn't sleep. Out of fright I used to keep almost inert, wondering all the time when the night would end. One day he showed no signs of coming back to the normal state. Then I became much worried and sent for Hriday through Kali's mother (the maid-servant). Hriday came and repeated aloud the name of the Lord; this made him regain his consciousness. The next day,

the Master taught me the particular Mantra I would have to utter at each kind of spiritual trance into which he entered."

A few days after I had become acquainted with the Mother, she said to me, "Please tell him that I would like to experience a little of spiritual ecstasy. I don't find him alone to speak about this matter myself.'

I thought it was quite all right that, since the request was from the Mother, I should convey it to the Master. The next morning when I went to his room the Master was seated alone on his bed. After saluting him I informed him of the Mother's request. He listened without replying and became grave. When he was in such a serious mood, no one dared utter a word. So I left the room after sitting there quietly for a while. Returning to the Nahabat, I found the Mother seated for her daily worship. I opened the door a little and peeped in and found her laughing. Now she was laughing, and now weeping. Tears were streaming from her eyes. After a while she gradually became still. I knew she was in Samadhi. So I closed the door and came away. After a long while I again went to her room. She asked me, "Are you just returning from the Master's room?" I said, "How is it, Mother, that you say you never experience high spiritual moods?" An abashed Mother began to smile.

After that incident I began to spend occasionally the nights with her at' Dakshineswar. Although I wanted to sleep on a separate bed, she would never allow me. She would drag me to her side. One night somebody began to play on the flute. At the sound of the flute, the Mother entered into a high spiritual mood, and she laughed every now and then. With hesitation I sat on a corner of the bed for a long time. I thought that I, being a worldly person, should not touch her at that moment. After a long while the Mother came back to the normal state.

One day, on the roof of Balaram Bose's house, the Mother passed into Samadhi while she was meditating. After she regained external consciousness, she said, "I found that I had travelled to a far-away country. There everybody showed me great tenderness. My appearance became exceedingly beautiful. The Master, who was present, affectionately made me sit by his side. I can't describe the joy I felt at that time. When I regained a little body-consciousness, I noticed my body lying nearby. Then I began to wonder, 'How can I enter into that hideous corpse?' I didn't feel the least inclined to get into it once again. After a long while I persuaded myself to enter into it, and I regained my body-consciousness."

One evening, on the roof of Nilambar Babu's house, the Mother, Golap-Didi, and I were meditating side by side. When my meditation was over, I noticed that the Mother was still absorbed in meditation–motionless, in Samadhi. When after a long while she regained partial consciousness, she began to say, "Oh, Yogin, where are my hands, where are my feet?" So we began to press her hands and feet, saying, "Here are your feet, here are your hands." But in spite of this, it took the Mother a long time to regain consciousness of her body,

One morning in Kalababu's grove in Vrindaban, the Mother was meditating, when she became absorbed in Samadhi. All attempts to bring her mind down to the physical plane proved futile. I repeated the Lord's name in her ears for a long time, but it produced no effect. At last Swami Yogananda came and repeated Sri Ramakrishna's name, which brought her mind down to the semi-conscious plane. Then, just as the Master used to do on similar occasions, she said, "I will eat something." Some sweets, water, and betel were placed before her, and she partook of a little of each, as the Master used to do towards the end of such periods of ecstasy. Even in taking the betel, she cut off its end in the manner of the Master. We were surprised to find that her manners, her way of taking food, and her general behaviour exactly resembled those of the Master. When she finally came down to the plane of physical consciousness, the Mother told us that the spirit of the Master had entered into her at that time. Swami Yogananda put to her some questions while she was in that mood, and she replied very much like the Master.

A few days after the passing away of the Master, the house-holder devotees like Ram Datta settled off the rent of the Cossipore Garden House and decided to give it up. The Mother was therefore taken to the residence of Balaram Babu. Soon after, the Mother went on a pilgrimage in the company of Yogen Maharaj, Kali Maharaj, Latu Maharaj, Lakshmi-Didi, and a few others. The party stopped at Varanasi, where they spent eight to ten days. Finally arriving at Vrindaban, the Mother resided at Kalababu's grove for about a year. I had come to Vrindaban a few weeks before the demise of the Master. On meeting me at Vrindaban she clasped me to her bosom, crying in grief, "Oh, Yogin!", and began to weep bitterly. After the death of the Master, this was my first meeting with her. At the beginning of her stay in Vrindaban, the Mother used to weep often. One day the Master appeared

before her and said, "Well, why are you crying so much? Here I am. Where have I gone? It is just like going from one room to another."

One day in Vrindaban the Mother saw a dead body being carried to the cremation ground, decked with flowers and to the accompaniment of devotional songs. On seeing the procession she said, "Look, how blessed this person is to die in holy Vrindaban! I also came here to die. Strangely enough I haven't had the trace of even a fever. And yet how old I am! I have seen such elderly persons as my father and my husband's elder brother!" At this we laughed and said, "Indeed, you saw your father! Who does not see one's father?" In those days the Mother indulged in such childish talk. In Vrindaban, at first the Mother wept bitterly for the Master, but later the Master kept her always immersed in bliss. The Mother then moved about like a carefree girl. She used to go round the temples daily. One day in the temple of Radharamana it appeared to her as if Navagopal Babu's wife was standing by the side of the image of Radharamana and fanning it. On returning home, the Mother said to me, "Yogin, Navagopal's wife is very pure. I saw her like this."

One day at Vrindaban the Master appeared before Mother and said, "Initiate Yogen with this Mantra." On the first day the Mother thought it was a freak of her mind. On the second day the vision was repeated, but she paid no heed to it. On the third day when she had the vision again, she said to the Master, "I don't even speak to him. How can I initiate him?" The Master said, "Ask daughter-Yogin to be with you at the time of initiation."

The Mother asked Swami Yogananda, through me, if he had received initiation already. He replied, "No, Mother, the Master did not give me any Ishta Mantra. I repeat a holy Name of my own choice." On hearing this; one day the Mother initiated him. The Mother was worshipping before a picture of the Master and the urn containing his relics. She sent for Swami Yogananda and asked him to sit by her side. While performing worship, she went into ecstasy and in that state gave him the initiation. She uttered the Mantra so loudly that I could hear it in the next room.

From Vrindaban we accompanied the Mother to Hardwar. Swami Yogananda was in the party. While travelling in the train, he contracted high fever. When I was feeding him with pomegranate juice, it appeared to the Mother, as if I were feeding the Master. Swami Yogananda, in his delirious condition, saw a hideous-looking figure which said to him, "I would have

taught you a lesson, but what can I do? Paramahamsadeva (Sri Ramakrishna) has ordered me to leave this place right now. I am unable to stay here even for a moment." Pointing to a woman wearing a red bordered sari, the figure further said, "Feed this woman with some Rasagollas." Curiously enough, soon after this vision, Swami Yogananda was relieved of his fever. Subsequently we went to Jaipur from Hardwar. There we saw the image of Govinda and visited the various temples. While going round, Swami Yogananda suddenly noticed an image by the side of a temple and cried out, "I was asked to offer Rasagollas to this deity." And in front, we found a shop selling Rasagollas. We purchased eight annas (fifty paise) worth of Rasagollas and offered them to the deity. On enquiry we learnt that it was an image of Sitala.

From there, the Mother returned to Calcutta, and after a few days stay at Balaram Babu's house, she left for Kamarpukur. After about a year at Kamarpukur, the Mother went to stay at Nilambar Babu's house at Belur, rented for her by the devotees. There in 1888 she stayed for about six months. She left the rented house in Kartik (October-November) and spent a few days at Balaram Babu's house at Calcutta. Shortly afterward she went on a pilgrimage to Puri. From Calcutta she travelled to Chandbali, where she boarded the Cuttack Canal steamer, and from Cuttack she went to Puri in a bullock cart. Sarat (Swami Saradananda), Rakhal Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda), Swami Yogananda, and others accompanied the Mother to Puri. She was accommodated in a house called 'Kshetrabasi', which belonged to Balaram Babu's family. There she stayed from Agrahayana (November-December) to Falgun (February-March). The Mother lived in a room with a porch in the front. Since the Master had not visited the temple of Jagannath, the Mother one day took his photograph to the temple concealed under her wrapper and uncovered it before the image of Jagannath.

After visiting the temple of Jagannath, the Mother remarked, "I saw Jagannath to be like a lion among men seated on his precious alter and I was attending on him as his handmaiden." On her return to Calcutta from Puri, the Mother stayed at the house of Master Mahasaya (Mahendranath Gupta) for three to four weeks and then went to Antpur (birthplace of Swami Premananda) together with Baburam (Swami Premananda), Naren (Swami Vivekananda), Master Mahasaya, Sannyal (Vaikunthanath Sannyal), and a few others. After about a week's stay there she travelled by bullock cart to Kamarpukur via Tarakeswar in the company of Master Mahasaya and some

others, and there she lived for about a year. Then she went to Calcutta before the Dol-festival and stayed with Master Mahasaya's family at Combulitola for about a month. Thereafter she lived in Balaram Babu's house during the latter's last illness and continued there till his death. Next she lived in a rented house at Ghusuri near the cremation ground of Belur from Jaistha (May-June) to Bhadra (August-September) of 1890. As she had an attack of blood dysentery there, she was removed to a rented house at Baranagar belonging to Sourindramohan Tagore for her medical treatment. Following a short stay there, the Mother moved to Balaram Babu's house, from where she returned to Jayrambati after the Durga Puja.

The Mother again came to Nilambar Babu's rented house at Belur in Ashadha (June-July, 1893). Then she spent the month of Falgun at Kailwar (Bihar), and from there she visited Varanasi and Vrindaban a second time, together with her mother and brothers. Coming back to Calcutta, she lived with Master Mahasaya at his Colootola residence for about a month and then returned to her native village. The next time when she came to Calcutta, the Mother lived for five or six months in a house attached to a godown on the bank of the Ganga at Baghbazar. It was at this house that Nag Mahasaya (Durgacharan Nag) saw the Mother. Then she again went to her native village and lived there for a year and a half. On coming back to Calcutta she stayed in a house in front of Girish Babu's. In this house Nivedita lived with the Mother for three weeks. Her next residence was at 16, Bosepara Lane, close to Girish Babu's house. It was here that Nivedita first organized her school. Next, the Mother lived in a house in front of Ramakrishna Lane on Baghbazar Street. Sarat too stayed there. From there the Mother moved back to her native place.

Again she came back to Calcutta on the occasion of Durga Puja at Girish Babu's house and stayed at Balaram Babu's house. At that time she was very much reduced owing to an attack of malaria. Then, following still another stay in her native village, she came to live in the new 'Udbodhan' house soon after it was constructed. She next visited Kothar (in Orissa), Madras, Bangalore, Rameswar, and other places; and then returned to the 'Udbodhan' house. Two days later the Mother went to her native village where she gave away Radhu in marriage. This time she returned from Jayrambati to Calcutta after about a year, and from there she went to Varanasi in Kartik (October-November) 1912. After staying there for about three weeks she returned to Calcutta.

In her younger days Mother had to cook often. Whenever her mother was unable to cook for some reason or other, she had to do the cooking herself. The Mother said, "I used to cook and my father would lift the rice pot from the fire." Later the Mother spent much of her time in attending to her relations and devotees.

02: Recorded by Smt. Kshirodbala Roy

The day I came from our suburban home to Calcutta to see the Holy Mother for the first time, I was feeling unwell. I went to Baghbazar in a carriage. On the way I felt giddiness and nausea. I somehow arrived at the Mother's house at Baghbazar and, climbing the staircase, saw the Mother at the door of the long room adjoining the staircase. She was on her way to take her bath. She was standing with one of her hands on the door frame as if waiting for me. As soon as her eyes fell on me, she smilingly said, "Where do you come from, child? Why have you come?"

I replied, "I have come to see the Holy Mother." At once she said, "I am the Mother, my child. The Master (his picture) is in the other room. Salute the Master and take your seat there. I shall be coming after my bath." Saying this, the Mother left the place.

I went to the door of the shrine room and saluted the Master from there, and then sat down. I had carried some sweets to offer to the Master. Nalini-Didi came and, sprinkling a little Ganges water on the packet of sweets, took the packet from my hand and kept it in the room. In the meantime the Mother hurriedly finished her bath and returned. I noticed that the worship of the Master and the offerings of fruits and sweets to him were already over and everything was still lying in the shrine room. As I was feeling giddy, I was afraid that if the Mother gave me Prasada to take, I might vomit. When she asked me, "Have you brought something for the Master?" I pointed to the packet of sweets I had brought, saying, "Yes, it has been kept there." The Mother held the packet containing the sweets before the Master's face and said, "O Lord, please eat."

Then she gave me Prasada consisting of some fruits on a brass dish and a little sherbet in a glass, and said, "Take this Prasada; it will not cause any vomiting." Taking a little Ganges water from a water-pot, she sprinkled it on my head and said, "I shall wait for you in the other room. Come there after taking the Prasada." Strangely enough, immediately after eating it I began to feel all right. Then I went to the room where the Mother was seated. To me it appeared as if she were the Universal Mother seated on an asana like a queen. Golap-Ma, Gauri-Ma and Yogin-Ma were seated around her. Though I felt the Mother to be one of my very 'own', the presence of others sitting there made me somewhat hesitant. I became worried whether I would be

able to tell the Mother my innermost thoughts. I said to her, "I could not see you during the last eight years in spite of my utmost efforts. Even after coming as far as Calcutta I could not see you; I had to go back." On hearing this, Gauri-Ma remarked, "Can anybody see the Mother before the time is ripe'?" I said, "I feel that the time has come now, Mother; now I have seen you. Kindly accept me. I have come here with the desire of receiving initiation from you. I have heard that one cannot have initiation before the time is ripe. Again, I hear that you send back some persons on the plea that they do not belong to this place. But if you refuse me, I shall not be able to live any longer."

Staring at me intently, the Mother said, "No, you will have initiation." Then she asked, "Daughter, what do you take on ekadasi?" I replied, "Formerly I used to eat sago, but learning that it is adulterated with various other things, I don't take it now." As soon as she heard this, the Mother said, "No, no, I say you should take sago; it will keep your body cool." Then with deep sorrow in her voice the Mother said, "Child, you have been practising much austerity. I say, don't do it any further. Your body has almost turned into a piece of wood. How will you perform spiritual practices if your health is spoiled, my child?"

She asked whether I used oil. I said, "I haven't used it ever since I was widowed." On hearing this she said, "The use of oil keeps the head cool. Therefore use oil." I said, "As I have not used it for a long time, I have begun to hate to touch it. I shall not be able to use oil, Mother." Golap-Ma said, "Though she is a mere child, she has spoiled her health by fasting and practising other austerities." Gauri-Ma said, "Dear, why have you cut off your hair?" I said, "Widows in our part of the country do not grow their hair." She replied, "Without hair one's eyesight deteriorates. Since you have dedicated your body to Sri Krishna, how does your hair belong to you, dear?" Yogin-Ma now said, "This body is the temple of God. It is wise to keep it fine." But the Mother said, "You have done well. Keeping one's hair gives rise to a feeling of fashionableness to some extent; for one has to take care of it. So what you have done is right. You have overcome the craze for luxuriant locks, and you have also come here. You have now achieved that for which you lived so austerely. Now, I say, don't indulge in such austerities any longer. You will have initiation tomorrow. Come here at eight o'clock in the morning. It will be nice to take a holy dip in the Ganges and to see Mother Kali on the day of initiation."

I reflected that in seeing the Holy Mother I had already seen the Mother Kali, and that I had become pure by touching her holy feet. Then I saluted her and left for home.

My husband's younger brother Satishchandra Roy, a disciple of the Holy Mother, had accompanied me to the Mother's house. On reaching my home I requested him to come from his residence again the next morning to escort me to the Mother's house. After my return from Baghbazar I was feeling giddy once again. Nevertheless, I prepared myself for going to the Mother's the next morning. But Satish did not turn up at the appointed hour. I became very dejected indeed. At noon Satish came and explained, "The Holy Mother sent me word last night, saying, 'my daughter will not have initiation tomorrow; for she is not keeping well. Bring her the day after tomorrow before ten in the morning.'" So this was the reason for his coming late. I was astonished to think of the Holy Mother's divine foresight.

The next morning I was feeling all right. Satish came at the appointed hour to escort me. Following the Mother's instructions I arrived at her house with some fruits, sweets, flowers, Bilva leaves and a Sari with a narrow red border. The Mother's appearance, it seemed to me, was wonderful. Wearing a yellow-coloured Sari, the Mother was standing at the door assuming; as it were, the form of my Ishta As her eyes fell on me, she said; "You are already late by five minutes. Hurry up, come to the shrine." She herself spread an asana in front of the picture of the Master and cleaned it with her hand. I thought, "How can I sit on the asana spread by her?" Instantly the Mother pushed the asana with her right foot, saying, "Are you satisfied now? Goodness! The girl is fastidious." While coming from home I had tied two rupees in coins in the loose end of my Sari to pay the coachman with, but I had forgotten about it at that moment. As I was about to take my seat, the Mother said, "Child, you have come to take shelter in the Master who had renounced 'woman and gold'. There are two rupees tied in the loose end of your Sari. Take them out." Immediately I removed the coins, kept them on the floor near the wall and took my seat on the asana.

It struck me that this Mother was not the same person I had seen the other day. At this thought I lost consciousness. Then and there the Mother caught hold of my hand and made me sit upright on the asana. Placing her hand on my head she uttered thrice in a sweet voice the assuring words, "Don't be afraid." She added, "Have no fear; now you have been reborn. I am assuming the fruits of all the deeds of your past lives. Now you are pure; you

are free of sin." Then I regained my normal state and the Mother gave me initiation.

I asked her, "Is there any Mantra prescribed for giving up the fruits of Japa?" The Mother said, "Don't say 'Giving up the fruits of Japa'; say 'offering the fruits of Japa.'" She placed in my hand a little Prasada of sweets and said, "After initiation one should not stay with one's Guru for long. So go home today, and come tomorrow and take your noon-meal here." I returned home after saluting her. The next day I went to the Mother's house at noon and had Prasada. After the meal was finished I came and sat near her. She asked me, "Do you know how to read and write? Read a small portion of the Gita daily and also Kathamrita of the Master and Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi. Many other books about the Master have also been published. Read them."

I said, "Mother, you certainly know that I cannot give my mind to domestic affairs at all and with what difficulty I live among worldly people. I pray to you, please don't keep me in the midst of worldly people." The Mother said, "Child, what is worldly life to you? For you worldly life is as good as living under a tree. But is life in the world separate from God? He is everywhere. Besides, you are a woman; where will you go, dear? Be content with wherever and in whatever situation He places you. The goal is to call upon Him and to attain to Him. If you call upon Him, He will lead you by the hand. You will have no fear if you can depend on Him. Another point — it is not wise that a Guru and his disciple live together, for while living together a disciple observes the life and activities of his Guru and very often takes his Guru to be a mere human being. This causes harm to the disciple. It would be very good if the disciple could live in a place close to his Guru's residence and spend some time daily in visiting his Guru, enjoying his company and receiving his instructions. However, unless there is some occasional contact between the two, the Guru may not remember his disciple always. You should come here daily."

At these words of the Mother I could clearly perceive the direction the remaining portion of my life was to take. The thought that I was destined for worldly life and not for a life of renunciation made me weep bitterly. Seeing me thus weep, the Mother very anxiously tried to console me. She said, "Child, I have spent my entire life in domestic situations. You are quite young. It is more dangerous to visit here and there for the sake of religion. I say, wherever and in whatever condition you may live, the dirt of the world

will cause no harm to you. The Master is there; you need not be afraid, you need not worry."

After this, I saluted the Mother and returned home. From that time I used to go to the Mother almost daily, usually in the afternoon, and return before dusk. She had given me the necessary instructions for my spiritual practices. And she had also advised me to get any doubt or question resolved by her. But the very sight of the Mother used to fill my heart with joy. I felt that I had achieved everything, that everything had been accomplished, and that I had nothing else to ask for. To me, the Mother was no other than the Universal Mother in all Her glory and my Chosen Deity who was present before me as Guru. What else could I expect to receive? This thought gave me unbounded joy. Never did I ask the Mother any questions. I was content with whatever she said on her own. One day I said to her, "Mother, you are the In-dweller, you know everything. Still, I emphatically say that I very much detest and fear the ways of worldly people. I have no family, house or wealth, and I shall never ask you for any of these things. You are aware of my heart's desire. Please grant me that, and keep me away from worldly people." Saying this, I wept bitterly. In reply the Mother consoled me with simple words just as a mother comforts her small child. And I forgot my worries and floated on an ocean of joy.

At times the Mother would say, "The Master used to say, 'Don't jump into the ocean of Maya, for you may be eaten up by sharks and crocodiles.' But why should you worry? You have the Master with you."

The Holy Mother lived a life very much hidden from public view, and she made me do the same. I saw women devotees mostly; I hardly saw the monks of the Belur Math. But even by seeing the Mother alone I felt that I had seen all that was worth seeing in the universe. Now I think that she had accepted me only because I had such an attitude. The Mother used to say only this much: Be content in all circumstances and take His name.

One day Sudhira-Didi brought some girls of the Sister Nivedita Girls' School to the Mother. One of them said to her, "Mother, why do you not please allow Kshirode-Didi to stay with us? She can stay there and coach the girl-students." But I never had, even absent-mindedly, talked with them about my board and lodging. Therefore, I was irked a little and thought, 'Why should they speak like this?' The Mother replied, "All persons are not born for the same purpose. You will learn and teach girls in turn—this is your

purpose. But Kshirode is not meant for this. No doubt teaching is a noble profession, but it is not meant for all." After the girls had left, the Mother remarked, "Is it an easy task to teach girls?"

Once I went to my native place and while returning I brought a pair of conch bangles for Radharani. But when I tried to put them on her wrists, I found that they were too small. Radhu couldn't wear them at all, and she broke into tears. It brought tears to my eyes too. I thought: With so much hope I brought them, but Radhu can't wear them. Nalini-Didi, Sarala-Didi, Radhu and I were discussing the matter quietly, when the Mother, who was then in the shrine room, called Radhu and said, "All of you come here." When we went to her, she asked, "What's the matter?' Radhu said weeping, "This sister has brought for me such a beautiful pair of conch bangles, but I am unable to wear them; they are too small." Instantly the Mother said, "What do you say! My daughter has brought the conch bangles, and they do not fit you! You should have come to me first. Come; let me see why they don't fit." Saying this, the Mother put them on Radhu's wrists in five minutes. This made us all surprised. Radhu, her eyes still brimming with tears, now broke into a smile. The Mother said to her, "Now you have a beautiful pair of conch bangles. Go and make Pranam to the Master, to me and also to my daughter." As she uttered this, I felt my heart palpitating. I thought, "Mother has never asked me about the locality of my home, my caste or my relatives." I said, "Mother, I belong to the Kayastha caste. Why should Radhu make Pranam to me?" The Mother bit her tongue and said, "Don't say this. Don't I know whether you are a Brahmana or a Kayastha woman? You have stayed here so long — are you a Kayastha, still?" Saying this, she told Radhu, "Go and salute your elder sister." Immediately Radhu made Pranam to Sri Ramakrishna, to the Holy Mother and then to me. I returned her salutation. The Mother laughed heartily and said, "So, you returned the salute?" But the situation made me feel uncomfortable and so I remained speechless.

One day Radhu, Nalini-Didi and the others anxiously got hold of me. I was to tell them where my home was, what my caste was, and also about my near and dear ones. But I was reluctant to disclose any such thing. That day the Mother called them and said, "Why are you teasing my daughter so much? Come here to me; I shall tell you everything." All of them rushed to the Mother. I too followed them. I thought: "The Mother never asked me about these personal details. Today I shall hear what she says." They all began to tell the Mother, "Kshirode Didi has been here so long but she has never disclosed her native place, her caste or who her relations are. Today we

requested her so endearingly but she won't disclose anything." The Mother said, "I can tell you everything. She was born in the land where oranges are grown. Her father-in-law lives in another district and he is a very close relation of Chandrakanta. She has no one, not even her mother. But she has a brother." Saying this, the Mother asked me, "Have I said correctly, my daughter?" As she mentioned the name of my mother, I heaved a deep sigh. The Mother being the In-dweller, she could grasp the innermost thoughts and feelings of others. She understood that my sigh was a sign of grief. Immediately she said, "Ah! When I mentioned your mother, you were overcome with sorrow, weren't you? But even if she had been alive, what could she do for you? She would have been a helpless spectator of your miseries. Do you still feel bereft of your mother even after having a mother like me?" On hearing these words, I began to shed tears of joy. The Mother asked Nalini-Didi and the others, "What more do you want to know?" They said, "What's her caste?" The Mother replied, "I shall not disclose this—they are devotees, they belong to one caste." The Mother's words made me beside myself with joy; I couldn't utter anything.

On a Kalipuja day I went to see the Holy Mother in the evening. The Mother's house was very crowded on that day. On my way I bought five champak flowers for fifty paise. With much difficulty I could offer those flowers at the holy feet of the Mother. She said, "Today there is a big crowd. You need not stay here. See Sudhira and then go to Gourdasi's place and talk with her before you return home." I was quite surprised at these words of the Mother. Never before had I received such instructions from her. I asked, "Should I go in a carriage or should I go on foot? Should anyone accompany me or should I go alone?" The Mother said, "Walk the distance and go alone. Will you remain a minor for ever? Now go, and come again later."

Then taking the Mother's name I went out at once without any further consideration. Inquiring of passers-by, I reached easily the school, of which Sudhira-Didi was the headmistress. She was quite surprised to see me and asked, "How could you come here in the dark? Why have you come?" I replied, "I don't know the purpose of my visit. I have come because the Mother asked me." On hearing this, Sudhira-Didi called the resident girls of her school, saying, "Stop your studies and come here. Kshirode-Didi has come from Mother's place. Come and see her."

All the girls came and surrounded me. But I wanted to leave and so I said, "As the Mother has directed, I must leave for the Saradeswari Ashrama just

now." Sudhira-Didi asked, "Should you go alone?" I replied, "The Mother's direction was that I should go alone."

I set out. As soon as I started walking, a gentleman came out from a room to the rear of the girls' boarding house and followed me. That an unfamiliar man was accompanying me made my heart palpitate. Gauri-Ma was of such a strict nature that she was likely to scold me on seeing an unknown man with me. But I didn't speak with him. On arriving at the gate of the Saradeswari Ashrama I said to the gateman, "Call Ma-ji. Tell her that a woman from the Mother's house at Baghbazar has come to see her."

A little later Gauri-Ma came down with a ghee lamp in one hand and an incense pot containing burning resin in another. As I went to salute her, she said, "Can I accept your Pranam today?" She stubbornly refused to accept my Pranam. I was amazed at Gauri-Ma's waving of light in front of my face, as if she was performing an Arati. Soon after, the said gentleman moved forward to salute Gauri-Ma. Instantly her appearance changed. She asked, "Where do you come from? Where do you live? Why have you come here?" Pointing at me, he said, "She had gone to Sudhira Basu's and had mentioned that she was coming to this place. I thought that since I had never met you, I would be able to see you if I accompanied her. That's why I have come."

"What's your name?" asked Gauri-Ma. On disclosing his identity, I recognized him, for I had heard his name. Gauri-Ma said, "I have heard of you. You belong to Sylhet (now in Bangladesh). Since Gauri-Ma does not live in purdah, you could have met her anywhere. If you want to see monks, go to the Belur Math. What is there in seeing a nun?" The gentleman said, "If I come here on Sunday, I can talk with you, I hope." Gauri-Ma replied, "No, no, my daughters are staying here. I can't meet you here." Hearing this, the gentleman saluted Gauri-Ma and left.

Then Gauri-Ma turned towards me and said, "What do you think of the Holy Mother? She is none other than the Empress of Kailash. None should think of her as a human being. The Mother is the Guru of the world, the Mother of the Universe. Since you have accepted her as your Guru, what is there to worry about?" Then Gauri-Ma talked about the Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna for about two hours. I remained standing at the door-step just as when I had come. She too was standing while talking. All of a sudden she caught hold of me and said, "Let's go; we shall worship the Mother." I said, "I didn't have any instruction to go to Baghbazar today once again. Besides,

it has become rather late, how shall I return home afterwards?" She said, "Come, I shall tell the Mother." So I went with Gauri-Ma. She also took two young girls, one of them carrying flowers and Bilva leaves and another carrying fruits and sweets. She herself was carrying a Kamandalu (water pot with a handle). People in the street looked at us amazed. As we arrived at the door of the Mother's house, I heard Mother say, "Now Gaurdasi has come making a spectacle in the street!" After going there I realized that Gauri-Ma was the last one to worship the Mother that day; all others had finished their worship. Gauri-Ma worshipped the Mother for a long time as one does in the Kali Puja. The worship was worth seeing indeed. Afterwards everyone present partook of Prasada. Gauri-Ma said to the Mother, "I have brought Kshirode here again. She told me that this wasn't your instruction. But I said to her that I would mention it to you." The Mother replied approvingly, "You have done very well." I spent the night at the Mother's house. I shall never forget in this life the joy I experienced on that night.

A year prior to my becoming a widow, I had one day cut and dressed a number of papayas and prepared a curry with them. The juice of the papayas caused an itching sensation on my fingers which became very much swollen, and the skin of my fingers cracked within a few hours. This created such a bad sore on my hand that various kinds of medical treatment failed to cure it. I suffered from it for twelve years. I had to use a spoon for taking my food. At times the condition would subside. But when it became aggravated, the contact of my hands with water made the sore septic. Though I had been in close association with the Holy Mother for the last one year, I had never shown my hands to her. I had decided never to say anything to her about this impermanent physical body of mine. And I had kept this chronic disease a secret from her lest it should somehow infect her too. I avoided visiting her when the disease became aggravated. One day, however, I went to see her when the sore was rather bad. On reaching her place I avoided making Pranam to her lest she should notice the sore while I touched her feet. But this thought made me quite restless. Just then I saw that a widow took the dust of Mother's feet, wrapping her hand with the loose end of her Sari. This gladdened my heart. And so I too took the dust of her feet, wrapping my hand with the end of my Sari. No sooner did I salute her than the Mother asked in surprise, "Daughter, why did you take the dust of my feet wrapping your hand with your cloth? Is there anything wrong with your hand?"

I was now in a fix, and my heart began to quiver. I thought, "Mother could have questioned the other woman. But instead of asking her, she has asked

me, 'Why did you take the dust of my feet in this way?'" So I replied, "I have a disease on my hand." She then said, "Let me see." On seeing my hand, she lamented so deeply that I was astounded. She said, "Ah! Dear, you are here so long and your hand is in such a condition! Though I am your mother, I wasn't aware of it. I feel so sorry, my dear." Then she asked me how long I was suffering and how I had contracted the disease. I had to disclose everything now.

Then the Mother said, "Dear, I am in such a state that I remain absorbed within myself. So I failed to observe you. You perform Puja with this hand; that's why the disease is lingering. Well, come with me. The flowers and leaves offered to the Master and the Charanamrita (holy water of worship) will be removed and thrown into the Ganges. Come quickly." I followed her to the other room. She said, "Look, the Kamandalu contains the Charanamrita as well as flowers and leaves. Dip your hand up to the wrist into it."

I did accordingly. Then she added, "Your hand will be free from the disease. But avoid handling fish, meat, onion and garlic as far as practicable. You cannot completely keep away from them. When you handle them, there may appear some eruptions on your hand. Perform the Master's worship daily. As soon as you notice some eruptions, apply the Master's Charanamrita on them. It will cure you. Had you trimmed your finger nails on the day you cut the papayas?" I replied, "I don't remember." She said, "You must have pared your nails and then come into contact with the papaya juice. These two together are responsible for your trouble."

In the afternoon the Mother said to the other women, "None of you, including your husbands and children, should cut your nails with the nail-cutters of barbers; for it may lead to many bad infectious diseases. My daughter here has contracted such a disease on her hand. But by the will of the Master it will not linger." On that occasion, the Mother spoke of the various dangers involved in eating together with others from the same plate, in lying on the same bed with another, and in using somebody else's cloth and bath-towel. She also told us how a person's good or bad physical condition is transferred to the body of another.

Strange enough, I had never told the Mother how I passed my days, and that I was compelled to cook fish and meat also. But she said, "You will not be able to avoid them. Whenever you handle meat and fish, you will have

eruptions on your hand, but as soon as the Master's Charanamrita is applied, you will get cured." It was a matter of pleasant surprise that the day on which I dipped my hand in the Charanamrita—from the very next day I got permanently cured. Whenever I touched fish, meat or such other food, I got eruptions on my hand, but they disappeared in an hour's time after applying Charanamrita on them. When I had become cured of this disease, I said to her, "Mother, I haven't come to you to get my bodily ailments cured. You can't get rid of me as easily as this!" The Mother laughed and said, "Child, your body is also my body. I suffer if you do not keep good health."

It was my resolve that I would never ask verbally or even mentally for any physical comfort or monetary or other material gain. I was afraid that the Mother might appease me by bestowing those things. Whenever I complained that I could not get any result from my worship, the Mother used to say, "I am your Guru; I know whether you are making progress or not. How can you understand it? You'll achieve everything, you'll achieve everything. Most obstacles in worship are not external; they are internal. They will gradually fall off one after another by taking the Master's name and by meditation. Do your duty. Don't pay attention to whether the blemishes of the mind are persisting or not." She also used to say, "The branch of a cocoanut tree drops off by itself at the proper time, but one has to exert much to tear off the branch before the proper time arrives. Likewise, everything will come about at the proper time." Then I asked her as to why I could not become absorbed in japa and meditation. She said, "You are doing all that is necessary; everything is going all right. My child, it is a great good fortune for you to have come here a widow at a tender age. You won't have to do much. All that you have to do is to pay obeisance to God at the end of the day. If a man firmly takes hold of one idea, he doesn't have to perform any other discipline. You will achieve everything spontaneously."

I was married when I was ten, and became a widow at fifteen. Taking refuge at the holy feet of the Mother, I had said to her, "Mother, I am surrendering myself at your holy feet. Kindly protect me." The Mother had assured me, saying, "There is nothing to fear. The Master will lead you by the hand." Not a single word which came from her lips proved to be untrue. Now I am nearing sixty. The Mother's holy hand has touched my head, and my head and hands have touched her holy feet—thus I have become blessed. Holding to her words, "There is nothing to fear. The Master will lead you by the hand," I have lived this long life, without ever being haunted by the desire for enjoyment. I have experienced only bliss, nothing but bliss. Except on

the day the Mother gave me initiation, she never instructed me as to what I should do. She used to say that the Master would do everything. We may not understand this, but her words are true. Even if one does not call on the Master and the Mother all the time, they protect their children from dangers and misfortunes. I have firmly realized that without their grace none can conquer worldly attachment by simply displaying bravado.

The Mother had said, "One should not go to see a deity empty-handed." Therefore I used to carry something or other when I went to see her daily. One day she said, "You have no money; why do you bring these things every day, my child? It will be enough if you bring a myrobalan. I eat through the mouths of all of you, dear! Your eating is as good as my taking food. How much I have eaten since coming to the circle of the Master!"

My second brother, who was seriously ill, came to Calcutta for medical treatment. He was to be operated upon by Dr. Sarbadhikari. All the members of our family had come to Calcutta. I had come to understand that the surgeon was not sure of the survival of a patient after this kind of surgical operation. I took my brother to see the Mother. It was a Sunday. The male devotees used to make Pranam to her in the afternoon. While on the way, my brother purchased a garland of flowers to offer at the Mother's feet. It had escaped my notice. On reaching there, I began to brood that my brother would salute the Mother along with a crowd of people and I would not be able to stay nearby. Would the Mother notice him at all? While Pranams were being made, I remained within the room. When the Pranam-making was completed, the Mother called Radhu and the rest of us. She removed a large quantity of flowers and garlands which had been offered at her feet. Taking out a garland of tuberoses from among them, she presented it to Radhu, saying, "My daughter's brother has given it to me." Then she said to me, "I have noticed your brother." I was surprised, for my brother had not come there earlier. I began to wonder whether my brother had brought that garland of tuberoses. Among the many garlands I could see only one of that kind.

I said to her, "Mother, it is because of him that I wish to keep myself away from worldly life. I wept bitterly in your presence only with the prayer of shunning their company. If he dies, I shall have to bear the burden of his family. Mother, because I am in the midst of worldly people, I am not likely to survive, even though I have taken refuge at your feet. Now what will happen to me? Please tell me what I am to do."

The Mother replied, "Even if your brother survives this operation, he will die one day, will he not? And if he survives, what good will he bring to you? So why should you worry so much?" I thought, then perhaps my brother's life would not be spared this time. But that very moment the Mother said, "Don't be afraid; the Master is there. Keep a photo of the Master in the operation theatre where your brother will be operated on. He will protect him. "

After hearing her say this, I returned home and disclosed it to all the family members. Then all began to say, "No more fear. He has touched the living Goddess Kali. There's no reason to fear." My brother came round by the grace of the Holy Mother and returned to his native place. When my uncle and elder brother, who had seen the Holy Mother, were told that in seeing the Mother they had actually seen Mother Kali Herself, they accepted the idea and began to express the view that they had seen and touched the feet of Mother Kali who was worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna himself, and that they would not have to go elsewhere for their spiritual welfare. I was the first among our family members to go to the Mother. Now, by her grace, almost everyone in our family has taken refuge at the holy feet of Sri Ramakrishna.

One afternoon I was at the Mother's house when a widow with a rosary of basil beads around her neck and wearing a cloth printed with the names of God, arrived to see the Mother. Before her arrival, the Mother had assumed a solemn attitude. When the widow advanced to salute her, the Mother said, "Don't touch my feet; salute me by touching the floor." But she ignored these words and saluted the Mother touching her feet. The widow was amazed to see the photo of Sri Ramakrishna and other things, and said to me, "Do you see? How beautiful it is!" "What do you show her?" the Mother asked. "Know that she worships him whose photo you are pointing to." Next, pointing at me, the widow asked the Mother, "Is she your daughter?" The Mother replied, "Yes, my child." The widow asked next, "How many children have you?" The Mother said, "Beings all over the universe are my children." Then the woman asked. "How many children you have given birth to?" The Mother replied. "My husband was a man of renunciation." Unable to understand its import, the woman pestered the Mother further with questions. I, too, was about to lose patience. The Mother said to me, "You explain these matters to her; I can't do it any further." Then I went on, "You know nothing about the Mother, I see. Why then, have you come to see her? Those who come to the Mother do not simply see and salute her. There is much to know about the Mother. There are so many books about her. You

can know all about her from many devotees too. Had you known a little about her, you would not have dared to ask her so many questions. You had better tell me what you have got to say. Please don't disturb the Mother." Still the woman continued, "My daughter visits this place. She brought big radishes here the other day." The Mother said, "Many persons present a lot of things. Can I take a note of all of them? I don't know your daughter." Thereafter the widow left and the Mother said to me, "Bring a little water and wash my feet. Fan me a little." I obeyed her.

One of my cousins was suffering from lachrymal fistula, and to get it operated by an eye-surgeon, he along with his parents and many other members of our family had come to Calcutta. I took him to the Mother before his operation. Earlier I had told the Mother about it. Approaching the Mother I saluted her and pointing to the boy, said, "Mother, this boy's eye is to be operated on." The Mother said, "Let me see his eye." Taking a look at his eye, the Mother observed, "Now-a-days, my child, we see various kinds of diseases and also physicians specializing in them. Formerly people did not suffer from so many ailments; nor did they know of so many kinds of medical treatment. Take, for example, the case of Radhu. She had so many ailments and had to pass through various kinds of treatment. Besides, I made promise of offerings to various deities for her cure, and yet she does not keep well. The Master alone knows what is in his mind." On hearing her, I laughed a little and reflected within myself: "How ignorant we are about the Mother! From her words it would appear that Radhu is her all. Thus she keeps her real nature hidden." None could understand her from her movements. Only he could recognize her to whom the Mother had revealed herself. Regarding the boy, the Mother did not say anything after seeing his eyes. We left after saluting her. Anyway the eye operation was successful.

Later, my aunt, before her return to her native place, came to visit the Mother one morning along with her children. Sitting with her legs stretched, the Mother was then cutting fruits for offering to the Master. They went straight to the Mother and saluted her. The Mother said to my aunt, "Are they all your children?" My aunt replied, "Yes, Mother, they are mine." The Mother said, "Very well. Oh, how devoted they are! All of them have prostrated themselves! My daughter knows everything about this place; still she has brought them here at this inconvenient time. It is now time for worship of the Deity. I have no time now to talk with you even for a while." My aunt said, "She (Kshirode) objected to our coming here at this time. But as we have no other time, we have come to you now. Mother, we want to

take Kshirode along with us to our native place for some days. I seek your approval." The Mother said, "What harm is there in taking her to your native place? But it will be nice if you bear her travelling expenses when sending her back." "We shall certainly do so," said my aunt. She, along with others, then got into their carriage.

One girl, known to me, had never seen the Mother. Her husband did not like such visits. But one day after her husband had left for his office, she pressed me to take her to the Mother and bring her back before her husband's return. I said, "The Mother takes rest at this hour of the day. You cannot see her now." She said, "Let's go, no matter what happens." As soon as I entered the Mother's house along with her, I saw Golap-Ma having her meal. I went to her with the idea that we would see Mother after she awoke. On seeing me, Golap-Ma burst out, "How queer are your ways! Why have you brought her at this time of the day? Aren't you aware that this is the time when the Mother takes rest?" I said, "Why are you scolding me? Am I so foolish as to go to the Mother, before she wakes up from sleep?" After a while I heard Mother calling me, saying, "Come here, daughter." Approaching near, I saw her standing by the side of her bed. She asked, "Who is this girl, dear? Did Golap scold you because you have come at this hour? Well, it is the Master's kingdom! No rules and regulations are valid here. Here the door is open to all. Whenever one gets the opportunity one may call on me. Don't take the scolding seriously, my child." We paid obeisance to the Mother and left. I told Golap-Ma, "Have you noticed with what a longing heart people come to see the Mother. Why only the Mother, people want to see you, too. But the door-keepers of the Mother's house as you are, you want to push them out. Mother does not belong to one or two persons, she is the Mother of all," Laughing, Golap-Ma said, "Well, you have won." The affection Golap-Ma, Gauri-Ma, Lakshmi-Didi, etc., had for us is indescribable.

Lady doctor Pramoda Dutta of Calcutta, a relation of mine, hailed from the same place as myself. Her husband, too, was a doctor. They were Brahmos. One day Dr. Pramoda Dutta expressed her desire to see the Holy Mother. She very much pleaded with me to escort her to the Mother's house. So, one day we were ready for the visit. Instead of wearing her professional robe, she put on a Sari with red border. She did not even wear shoes. She sprinkled a little Ganges water on her head before she started for the Mother's house.

Going to the first floor in the Mother's house, one could see in the room adjoining the stairs, a photo of the Holy Mother in meditation posture. As

her eyes fell on this picture, Pramoda Devi inquired, "Whose photo is this?" I said, "It is the Mother's." She gazed at it for long and remarked, "She's Radha herself." I felt inclined to laugh, for being a Brahmo how could she utter this! On the first floor she met the Mother and saluted her. After a while the Mother asked Sarala-Didi "Bring that boy and get him examined by her." Now I do not remember whose child it was. As the Mother uttered these words, Pramoda Devi quietly asked me, "How could she guess that I was a doctor?" The child was brought before her. At 4 p.m. sweets were offered to the Deity and the Mother distributed the Prasada to all except Pramoda Devi. I could not but feel embarrassed at this. Now, Pramoda Devi was repeatedly telling me, "She gave Prasada to all, but why not to me?" I said to her, "Why don't you ask the Mother?" I did not dare to give her the Prasada that was in my hand. Later Pramoda Devi said to the Mother, "Mother, you distributed Prasada among all; but why didn't you let me have a little of it?" The Mother said, "You are a Brahmo, dear. How can I give you Prasada unless you ask for it?" Pramoda Devi said, "Give me a little Prasada." The Mother too had kept apart one Rasagolla, and she now gave it to Pramoda Devi. The latter tied the Prasada at the loose end of her Sari, saluted the Mother, and returned home. She said to her husband, "Look, the place where I had gone today is a heavenly abode. The person I saw and whose feet I touched there is verily Radha. I have brought a little Prasada for you. I shall give you only if you accept it respectfully." Dr. Dutta said, "What does it matter to the Universal Mother if an insignificant person like me does not eat Her Prasada?" Saying this, he took the Prasada in his palm, touched it by his head, and ate. Pramoda Devi, too, described to him her experience in detail, and said repeatedly, "Today I visited Vrindaban and saw the holy feet of Radharani. I have been blessed."

When my aunt and others left for their native place, I did not accompany them. Back at the native place, my uncle wrote me a letter, saying, "I feel very sorry that you have not come. It fills my heart with great joy when I think that you have dedicated yourself to the feet of the Divine Mother. If you ever happen to come to your native place, do so after surrendering at the feet of the Mother your mind which is at the root of all troubles. Only then will you be free from all worry." I read out the letter to the Mother. On hearing its contents the Mother said, "Is the mind the cause of troubles only? Even when you try to attain to Brahman, you shall have to carry with you the mind, too. When you attain to It, none of them will be there. At the present stage the assistance of the mind is very necessary. It is the pure mind which shows man the path." I wrote to my uncle these words of the Mother.

On this occasion the Holy Mother said this also, "As you turn the direction of the wicked mind, that mind itself will be able to grasp the Chosen Deity. However, you have nothing to worry. The Master is holding you by the hand. In every circumstance he is always with you." I deeply felt many a time in my life the immense strength behind those words of the Mother.

One afternoon there came some women, one of whom asked the Mother, "Mother, many people say that Gauranga Mahaprabhu is not an Incarnation of God. Is it true?" The Mother said, "People may say so, for it is not easy to comprehend a human being as an Incarnation of God. In brief, if everybody could comprehend him as an Incarnation of God, he would not have had to preach divine love at the cost of being beaten up." While saying this, tears rolled down her cheeks. Soon after, she added, "Can everybody recognize an Incarnation? One or two persons only can recognize him. How much suffering do they undergo for the liberation of human beings! Even when the Master used to vomit blood, he never stopped speaking. He was all the while worried about the well-being of people."

There is a statement of Gauranga Mahaprabhu, "Come, repeat the name of Hari, and you shall have delicious soup of magur fish and the embrace of a young woman." The Mother explained the context of this statement, also what people took it for, and its real purport. At length she said, "What do you need an Incarnation for? To anyone, his own Guru is far superior to even an Incarnation of God. Try to understand this and keep steady."

The Mother used to keep a close watch over the conduct of women who lived with her at Baghbazar. She used to express her annoyance even if a metal pot or a bowl fell from somebody's hand. None of them was permitted to talk without some plausible reason. One day Radharani, with her tinkling anklets on, was going down the steps hurriedly. On hearing the jingling of the anklets, the Mother stared hard upward in such a manner that I became apprehensive. As soon as Radharani appeared, the Mother said, "Radhi, are you not ashamed? My Sannyasin children are staying downstairs, and you are running along the stairs with anklets on. Tell me, what they will think of you. Take off the anklets right now. Men and women who are here have not assembled for fun. Every one of them is doing spiritual practice. Do you know the consequences, if their practices are disturbed?" As the Mother said these words, Radhu took off the anklets and threw them towards the Mother. Fearless though she was, we all became frightened. Another day Radhu after her bath was combing her hair and making some design by pressing her hair

with a towel. Seeing this, the Mother said, "What are you doing? You think you look very beautiful by such means. Far from it; all this seems ugly to me. I never braided my hair myself. Gaurdasi used to come from time to time and braid my hair. Then again, I could not retain the braid for long and undid it soon. These days I find you behaving otherwise." Golap-Ma, who was nearby, said, "Mother, you are muktakesi, indeed! Therefore what will you do but keep your hair unbraided?"

One day the wife of a Munsiff (a judicial officer) came to the Mother. The women present there were discussing the World War. The Munsiff's wife asked the Mother, "Everybody says that the war is going to extend over here. If so, what will happen to us, Mother?" The Mother replied, "These are but rumours. Why should the war spread up to this place? The warfare is not as intense there even as it should have been. Why should it then extend over here?" Many others present spoke variously on this subject. The Mother sat quietly, seemingly disinterested.

Famine was raging throughout the country. The Ramakrishna Mission was rendering much relief to the famine-stricken people. One day the Mother narrated the famine conditions very vividly. She spoke of the distress of people at various places, the amount of money the Mission was spending to redress their sufferings and the way the monastic members of the Order were working. It seemed to me that she was feeling in her heart of hearts all the sufferings of the world.

Off and on I used to call upon Lakshmi-Didi at Dakshineswar. She often spoke to me in confidence, "Tell the Mother that I do not like to stay here. The nieces who attend upon me here don't like any devotee to come to me. But I cannot stay at a place where there are no devotees. Tell the Mother that I shall go to Vrindaban and that I shall take you along with me." I told Mother everything. The Mother said, "See, daughter, Lakshmi goes mad at the sight of devotees. That's why those two girls (nieces of Lakshmi-Didi) feel annoyed at the coming of devotees there. They should not be blamed, dear. Tell Lakshmi, I shall go to her one day. Besides, you should not go to any place in her company. If she comes across a devotee on her way, she would stay there for a week. Someone has to be always with her to guard her. She wants to stay in Vrindaban. People are so pestered with monkeys there. Will she be able to stay there?" I passed on to Lakshmi-Didi everything the Mother had said. I further added, "You are now in such a mental state that if you are to be sent anywhere, some special arrangements

are to be made for you. I hear you too have the same experience as the Master." No sooner did I utter this, than Lakshmi-Didi began to rebuke me, saying, "Does it happen to a human being what happened to the Master? I am the victim of a disease; that's why I cannot move out from here." These days Lakshmi-Didi behaved like a child.

One day a woman vendor came to sell blankets. Nalini-Didi was trying to settle the price of a blanket. The vendor demanded one rupee and twenty-five paise, but Nalini-Didi was trying to settle it at one rupee. The Mother heard their talk from a distance. She called Nalini-Didi and said, "What are you haggling with her for?" Nalini-Didi said, "I want to pay one rupee for a blanket but she is asking for a quarter of a rupee more." Being a little displeased at this, the Mother said, "How is it that you are haggling with her so long just to save one quarter of a rupee? Fie upon you! She moves from door to door, carrying blankets on her head, for earning some money. And you have detained her for saving a few coins. Moreover, what do you want a blanket for? You have everything, still you want to purchase one more blanket."

Then pointing at me, the Mother said, "It would rather be nice if you could give one blanket to my daughter. She doesn't use anything except a blanket. But she possesses only one blanket. She passes the winter days with this. Still, she does not ask anyone for another piece of blanket. She has perhaps never used more than two Saris at a time throughout her life. In spite of this she is quite happy. You don't see the bright side of others." I was simply stupefied. I wondered how the Mother was posted with so much information about me, although I never mentioned to her anything about my blanket or Sari. How many times she made me understand that she was truly our Mother! Discarding her physical body the Mother is now bestowing her blessings much more. Whoever calls upon her, the Indwelling Mother approaches him and settles all his problems. Formerly one had to make various arrangements to see her. Now, sitting at a place if someone sincerely applies one's heart, one can find the Mother. When her disciples are in trouble, she comes on her own and protects them. I have heard many such anecdotes.

Once I came from my native place to Calcutta on the Saptami Puja day (the first day of Durga puja). I was keeping rather poor health and was running a temperature. Intending to worship Mother with the temperature on, I went to her carrying some select flowers. A few days ago Revered Swami

Premananda Maharaj had passed away. That year Durga Puja was suspended at the Belur Math. Durga Puja was, however, being held at the monastery at Varanasi. I approached the Mother and worshipped her. As her eyes fell on me, she lamented, saying, "Ah" you look very much pulled down, my child!" She then mourned for Premananda Maharaj, too. She continued, "You should leave for Varanasi this very night. Some Sannyasins and Brahmacharins of this place are going to Varanasi. Your health is very much run down. Stay at Varanasi for about a month." I said, "What's the use of going there? I love to stay here." The Mother said, "What do you say? Varanasi is the abode of Lord Viswanath." I said, "This is the abode of Annapurna." The Mother laughed and said, "Nevertheless, you will come round, if you stay there for some days."

I had brought with me some pickle of tamarind from my native place for presenting to the Mother. Seeing a big crowd at the Mother's house, I wondered where I should place it and whether it could be of any use to the Mother. The Mother, the Indwelling Spirit of my being, called Golap-Ma and said, "Keep this pickle with care. I shall take it later. Give my daughter some fruits for her consumption during her journey." I received them. We left for Varanasi.

Varanasi was in the grip of a virulent kind of influenza at the time. As soon as the monks there saw me, they said to me, "Now the attack of influenza is so devastating here that you, instead of regaining your health, are very likely to contract influenza and suffer." I kept quiet thinking, come what may, I shall stay here; for I have come on the advice of the Mother. Nalini-Didi and a few others, who had accompanied me, left Varanasi just after the Puja, but I continued to stay there. I stayed in the Rana Mahal. Some days later I contracted influenza. Then the monks helped me much by sending a physician for me and providing medicines. One day I saw the Mother appear before me in a dream. She said, "There's nothing to fear. I am here. I shall take care of you." Next day my illness took a turn for the better, and I came round in a few days' time. As soon as I had completed one month in Varanasi, I returned to Calcutta. On seeing me, the Mother said smilingly, "It's a relief to me, dear. I sent you to Varanasi for your good, but the illness you contracted there was about to harm you."

03: Recorded by Swami Santananda

I asked the Holy Mother, "How shall I lead a spiritual life, Mother?" She said, "Spend your days as you are doing now. Pray to Him earnestly and remember Him always,"

Disciple: Mother, the fact that even great men become degraded frightens me terribly.

Mother: When a person has enjoyable things all around him, their influence naturally affects him. My son, don't look at a woman, even if it be only a figure made of wood. Avoid the company of women.

Disciple: Men can't do anything on their own. It is He who is making them do all that they do.

Mother: True it is that He is causing men to do everything. But do they have that understanding? Being filled with egotism, they think they are the doers of everything and that they don't have to depend upon God. Those who rely on Him are protected by Him from all dangers.

Then pointing to a monk, the Mother continued: "The Master used to say, 'Monk, beware!' A monk has always to be on the alert. He should be cautious all the time. A monk's path is very slippery. In walking along a slippery path, one has to move cautiously at every moment. Is it easy to become a monk? A monk must not even glance at a woman. While walking he should keep his eyes fixed on his toes. The ochre cloth of a monk protects him as does the collar on a dog. No one hurts such a dog, for they know it has a master.

"A man's mind runs after bad things. If he wants to act virtuously, the mind fails to co-operate. In earlier days I used to leave my bed daily at three o'clock in the morning to meditate. One day I felt unwell and out of laziness dispensed with the meditation. Because of this my meditation was stopped for a few days. Therefore, if one wants to achieve something noble, he must be sincerely arduous and seized with a firm resolve. When I used to stay in the Nahabat, on moonlit nights I would look at the reflection of the moon in the still waters of the Ganges and, weeping, pray to God, 'There are stains even on the moon, but let my mind be absolutely stainless.' During my stay

there the Master forbade even Ramlal to see me, although he was a nephew. Now-a-days I talk with all and come out in the presence of others.

"You are a Calcutta boy. Had you so desired, you could have married and led a householder's life. Since you have renounced everything, why should you give your mind to it again? Should one again take in the spittle that has been once spat out?"

Disciple: Mother, is it good to practise asanas, pranayama, and other exercises?

Mother: Asanas and pranayama endow one with occult powers and these lead a man astray.

Disciple: Is it good for a monk to go to places of pilgrimage?

Mother: If one's mind is at rest in a particular place, then what need is there to go to places of pilgrimage?

Disciple: Mother, I don't have time even for meditation. Kindly make my Kundalini awaken.

Mother: It will certainly awaken. A little Japa and meditation will awaken it. Does it wake up on its own? Do Japa and meditation. The practice of meditation will lead your mind to such one-pointedness that you won't like to give up meditation. But when you do not achieve such concentration of mind, don't force yourself to meditation. On such occasions finish your spiritual practice by simply saluting the Lord. The day on which you have the right mood, you will have meditation spontaneously.

UDBODHAN
19 June 1912

Disciple: Mother, why is it that my mind does not become steady? When I try to think of God I find it drawn to various worldly objects.

Mother: It is harmful if the mind is drawn to worldly objects like money and members of one's family. Nonetheless, the mind naturally dwells on one's daily activities. If you don't succeed in meditation, practise Japa. Japa leads

to perfection. One attains perfection through Japa. If a meditative mood sets in, well and good. If not, don't force your mind to meditate.

26 Agrahayana (November-December) 1912:

Disciple: For practising spiritual disciplines in Varanasi, should one live in the monastery or in some lonely place?

Mother If you practise spiritual disciplines for some time in a solitary place like Rishikesh, you will find that your mind has gained in strength, and then you can live in any place or in the company of anyone without being in the least affected by it. A sapling must be protected by a fence all around, but when it grows big not even cows and goats can injure it. Spiritual practice in a solitary place is essential. When worldly thoughts crop up in your mind, and they possess it, then you should go away from the company of others and pray to Him with tears in your eyes. He will remove all the dross of your mind, and will also give you understanding.

Disciple: I don't have enough strength for doing spiritual disciplines. I have surrendered myself to your holy feet; please do as you will.

With folded palms the Mother began praying to the Master, "May the Master protect you in your vows of Sannyasa. He is looking after you; what should you be afraid of? If the mind is kept engaged in some work, it doesn't indulge in silly thoughts. But if you sit idle, the mind is likely to indulge in various kinds of thoughts. "

VARANASI
17 Pous (January-February) 1912:

Disciple: How and where should I perform spiritual disciplines?

Mother: Varanasi is the place for you. Spiritual discipline means holding the mind steadfast at His holy feet all the time and immersing the mind in thoughts of Him. Repeat His Name.

Disciple: What can repetition of His Name achieve, if it is not attended with earnestness?

Mother: Regardless of whether you get into water willingly or are pushed, your clothes will be soaked. Practise meditation regularly, for your mind is still unripe. After prolonged practice of meditation your mind will become steady. And you should constantly discriminate between the real and the unreal. Know the worldly objects to which the mind is drawn to be unreal and surrender your mind to God. A man was angling in a pond all by himself when a bridegroom's procession with its music passed by. But his eyes remained fixed on the float.

Disciple: What is the aim of life?

Mother: The aim of life is to realise God and remain immersed in the contemplation of His holy feet always. You monks belong to the Master. He is watching over your earthly life as well as your life to come. What worry do you have? Can anyone think of God all the time? Spend some time relaxing and some time absorbed in thoughts of Him.

VARANASI
I8 Pous, Thursday:

Mother: A monk must be free from anger and hatred, he must tolerate everything. The Master used to tell Hriday, "You will bear with my words and I shall bear with yours-then only we can satisfactorily pull on. Otherwise, the cashier of the temple estate may have to be called for settling our disputes."

VARANASI
23 Pous, Tuesday, 9.30 A.M.:

Mother: The Master used to tell me, "Take short walks, otherwise you won't be able to maintain your health." In those days I lived in the Nahabat. I used to bathe in the Ganges at 4 o'clock in the morning and would then enter the Nahabat, not to come out of it again during the daytime. One day the Master said to me, "Today a Bhairavi will come. Dye a cloth and keep it ready; I have to give it to her." The Bhairavi arrived that day when the worship of Mother Kali was over. The Master began to chat with her on various topics. She was a little hot-headed. She used to boss over me always. She would tell me at times, "You must keep Panthabhat2 for me; otherwise I shall pierce you with my trident!" Hearing this I would get frightened. But the Master would reassure me, saying, "You needn't fear. She is a true Bhairavi. That's

why she is somewhat hot-headed." Sometimes she brought such a large quantity of alms that it would last for seven or eight days even. At this the cashier of the Temple estate would say, "Mother, why do you go out and beg your food? You can get it here."

The Bhairavi would reply, "You are my Kalanemi uncle, Can I rely on you?"

The Mother continued, "During the years of his spiritual practices, the Master would shrink through fear at the sight of various objects of temptation; he would shun all these allurements. One day in the Panchavati grove he suddenly saw a boy approaching him. This started him thinking, 'What is this?' Then the Divine Mother explained to him that a shepherd boy of Braja would join him as his spiritual son. When Rakhal came, the Master said, 'My dear shepherd boy has come. Tell me, what's your name?' 'Rakhal,' he replied. The Master remarked, 'Yes, yes, that's right.' This was exactly in keeping with what he saw at the Panchavati grove.

"Hazra told the Master, 'Why do you think so much about Narendra, Rakhal and the others? Why don't you immerse your mind in thoughts of God all the time?' The Master said, 'All right, I'll keep my mind immersed in God.' Saying this, he went into Samadhi, and his hair stood on end. He continued in that state for about an hour. Then Ramlal began to utter the names of various gods and goddesses. After he had done this for a long time, the Master regained his bodily consciousness. When his Samadhi had passed, he remarked to Ramlal, 'Did you notice the mental state into which I enter whenever my mind dwells on God? That's why I keep my mind at a lower level by thinking of Narendra and the others.' Ramlal said, 'No, please continue to stay in your own mood.'"

Disciple: I'm practising a few breathing exercises. Should I continue them?

Mother: You may practise them a little. But it's not safe to do them for very long, for it may throw you off your balance. What need is there of breathing exercises if your mind becomes concentrated on its own?

Disciple: Unless the Kundalini is aroused, nothing worthwhile can be achieved.

Mother: Certainly it will awake. Repetition of His name will lead to the goal. Even when your mind does not become concentrated you can repeat the holy

Name thousands of times. One hears the anahata-dhvani prior to the rousing of the Kundalini. But this is not possible without the grace of the Divine Mother.

The Mother continued, "In the early hours of the morning I was musing that I would not be able to see Lord Viswanath. It is a tiny emblem of Siva covered all over with vilva leaves and water to such an extent that one can hardly see it. As I was thinking this way, all of a sudden appeared the jet-black stone emblem of Siva—Viswanath Himself! I saw Nati's mother run her fingers over the head of Siva. Then I too quickly came and put my hand on Siva's head."

Disciple: Mother, I don't like the stone emblem of Siva anymore.

Mother: How is that, my son? How many great sinners come to Varanasi and get emancipation by touching Lord Viswanath! He is accepting the sins of all with perfect composure. When people come here on weekends and salute me. I feel a burning sensation in my feet. Only after I wash my feet can I be at peace again.

Disciple: If the Lord is the Father and Mother of all, why does He induce people to commit sins?

Mother: True it is that He has become all living beings, but everybody reaps the fruit of his actions according to his past impressions and deeds. No doubt the sun is one, but its shining varies according to the place and the objects it illumines.

1 January 1917:

I said to the Mother, "Mother, kindly bless me so that I may have good 'meditation and get immersed in His holy thoughts."

The Mother blessed me by touching my head with her hand and said, "Also you should always discriminate between the Real and the unreal."

Disciple: You see, Mother, sitting quietly I am able to discriminate, but then the real test comes in the field of action. I am simply carried away. Mother, please give me strength so that I can keep steady at such times.

Mother: My son, the Master will protect you. May you attain knowledge and illumination.

Then she said to another monk, "You are all monks; it is very harmful for you to keep connection with householders. It is bad even to be in the vicinity of worldly people."

KOALPARA
27th May 1919

Disciple: Mother, so many days have passed! What have I achieved?

Mother: Pulling you free from worldly tribulations the Lord has placed you at His holy feet. Is this not a rare fortune? Yogen (Swami Yogananda) used to say, "Whether I perform spiritual practices or not, I am free from worldly botherations." Don't you see how much I suffer from Maya owing to Radhu?

Disciple: I want to practise Sadhana in a solitary garden for some days.

Mother: This is the time for such practices. One must do them at a young age. And you shall do so, of course. But be careful about your food. Because of too much austerity, Yogen suffered terribly until at last he died prematurely.

KOALPARA
29th May 1919

Disciple: ……Babu doesn't visit the Math any more. Nor does he call on you here. Why is he acting like this?

Mother: True, he didn't see me when I was in Calcutta.

Disciple: He is an old devotee; how did this change come over him?

Mother: All this is the outcome of his past deeds. The actions of many births had accumulated. At long last he has been forced to yield to their effect. But all these accumulated waves of past actions will pass off. He will be liberated in one birth.

Disciple: If everything happens in accordance with His will, then why does He not cut away the bondage of Karma?

Mother: If it is His will, He can certainly cut it all away. But don't you see that even the Master had to suffer from the consequences of his past deeds. Once his elder brother Ramkumar, while in delirium, was drinking water, when the Master took away the glass from him. Annoyed at this, Ramkumar cursed him, saying, 'As you have prevented me from drinking water, so you too will not be able to eat or drink anything in your last days.' The Master said, 'Brother, I took away the glass of water from you for your own good, and you have cursed me for that!' Then Ramkumar wept saying, 'Brother, I don't know why I uttered such words.' See, even the Master had to reap the fruit of his past deeds. He couldn't take any food during his last illness. This devotee too has changed owing to his deeds in many past lives. Don't you see what happened to A. ... ? It's really difficult to understand why and how such things happen.

KOALPARA
4th June 1919

Disciple: Mother, shall I keep count while I do Japa?

Mother: If you count while you do Japa, your attention will be drawn to the counting. Do Japa without counting.

Disciple: Why doesn't my mind get absorbed while doing Japa?

Mother: You will succeed through practice. Don't give up your practice of Japa, even if your mind doesn't become steady. Do your spiritual practice ardently. Repeating His name will make your mind steadfast like the flame of a lamp protected from wind. Wind makes a flame unsteady. Similarly, desires prevent the mind from becoming concentrated. Besides, if the Mantra is not pronounced correctly, it takes more time for one to achieve any result. A woman had ‘Rukmini nathaya' as her Mantra. She used to utter 'Ruku', 'Ruku', and on account of this her progress was retarded. But through the Lord's grace she later got her Mantra corrected.

KOALPARA
12th June 1919

Disciple: I have been practising Asanas for some days to keep my body fit. It helps in digesting food and in maintaining continence.

Mother: If you practise them too much, your mind may become attached to the body, but if you give them up, you stand the risk of falling sick. Keeping this in mind, act accordingly.

Disciple: I practise them for only five to ten minutes in order to have good digestion.

Mother: Then go ahead. I was trying to impress upon you that a man's body becomes unwell when physical exercise is given up. I bless you, my boy. May you be illumined.
Pointing to the flag hoisted on the top of the temple of Venimadhava at Varanasi, the Mother observed, "You see me so incapacitated now, but when I visited Varanasi after the demise of the Master; I climbed to the top of the temple of Venimadhava to fasten the flag. I also climbed the Chandi Hill at Hardwar and the Savitri Hill at Pushkara."

In those days a certain monk of the Ramakrishna Order had been practising hard austerities at the Manikarnika Ghat at Varanasi. When I was leaving for Calcutta he told me, "Please ask the Mother when God will bestow His grace upon me." When I conveyed this to the Mother, she became grave and said, "Write to him that there is no such rule that God's grace will fall on him simply because he is practising austerities. In olden times the ascetics practised austerities for thousands of years with their feet up and heads down, and with fires burning under them. Even then, only some of them received God's grace; others did not receive it at all. It entirely depends on His will."

At the Udbodhan house one day a young man expressed to the Holy Mother his desire to become a monk. Smiling a little, the Mother pointed to a monk standing nearby and said, "If everybody becomes a monk, who will look after them? Who will supply provisions for them?" The young man married subsequently.

Once it was proposed that I should travel to Varanasi in the company of a distinguished householder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. He had agreed to pay my fare. On hearing of this, the Holy Mother said to me, "You are a monk.

Won't you be able to procure your passage money yourself? These are householders; why should you travel with them? As you will all be travelling by the same compartment in the train, they might tell you, 'Do this, do that.' Being a monk why should you take such orders from them?"

On another occasion it was decided that I should be transferred from Calcutta to Varanasi, but I could not make up my mind on this. So I asked the Mother for guidance. She said, "Look, people at Calcutta right from the morning rush about engaged in their job or business or something else, whereas people at Varanasi keep themselves busy from early morning in bathing in the Ganges, seeing Lord Viswanath, practising Japa and meditation, and so on." I replied, "But here I am engaged in your service." The Mother said, "Yes, this too is a point that should be taken into consideration so long as this body lasts."

One day, in the course of a conversation, the Mother said, "Is the Master's hair a trifle? After his passing away, when I went to Prayag (Allahabad). I carried some of his hair to offer at the confluence of the Ganges and Jamuna. Standing in still water I was holding the hair in my hand and was thinking of immersing it in the water, when suddenly a wave rose and swept away the hair from my hand. The water, already sacred, took the hair from my hand in order to increase its sanctity."

One day I asked the Mother, "Mother, there are some who have different Gurus for their Mantra and their Sannyasa. Now, whom should they meditate upon as their Guru?" The Mother replied, "The giver of the Mantra is the real Guru, for by the repetition of this Mantra one obtains dispassion, renunciation, and Sannyasa."

04: Recorded by Surendranath Sircar

During the Christmas holidays of 1910, I saw the Holy Mother for the first time at Kothar. Sri Hemanta Mitra and Sri Birendra Majumdar, two devotees from Shillong, had come with me. Sri Ramakrishna Bose, Swami Dhirananda, Swami Achalananda, Swami Atmananda, and Sri Haraprasanna Mazumdar, a devotee of Nag Mahasaya, were staying at Kothar at that time.

It was about 1 p.m. when we reached the place. We had brought with us some fruits, oranges, honey, etc. for the Holy Mother. Ramakrishna Babu carried them to her. After our bath we were called for our noon meal. In the meantime we heard some of the monks whispering, "As they have come from such a long distance, they must be permitted to meet the Mother, but they should not be allowed to talk much." Biren Babu, who overheard it, passed on the message to me. I told him, "Mother willing, it will be done. What is there to worry about?" When my companions proceeded for their meals, I told Ramakrishna Babu, "I shall not take any food before I pay my respects to the Holy Mother." Ramakrishna Babu carried this message to the Mother, and he soon returned conveying her permission. On entering the inner courtyard, we saw the Holy Mother sitting in the verandah. She waited for us, covering her body with a wrapper, and her face by the end of her Sari. As I approached the Mother, Golap-Ma said, "He is a mere boy, Mother. The boy has come to pay his respects to you." At these words, she lifted up the cloth from her face. We could clearly see the face of the Holy Mother. Since that occasion the Mother never kept her face covered in my presence. I prostrated flat on the ground and uttered, "I take refuge in Thee." Touching my head, the Mother blessed me, saying, "May you have devotion."

Disciple: Mother, it is my desire to spend a few days here. But in a rich man's house like this, it is rather difficult to meet you.

Mother: I shall send for you. Now go and take your food, and have some rest.

After the noon meal we rested. In the afternoon the Revered Golap-Ma brought me a cup of pudding which had been offered to the Mother and said, "The Mother has given you this consecrated pudding." A little later someone came and announced, "The Mother is calling you." I saw her for the second time. My salutations over, I said, "Mother, I want to speak a few personal

things to you, but I hesitate to do so in the presence of others." "AII right," said the Mother. "Please leave this place for a while," she said to the person who had called me. The person went away.

Earlier I had seen Sri Ramakrishna as well as the Holy Mother in my dreams. Now I disclosed this to the Mother. On hearing it she said, "What you have seen is true." Mother asked me concerning the other two devotees, "Well, what do they want?"

Disciple: Mother, if you are pleased, they want spiritual initiation from you.

Mother: Well, you all see me tomorrow morning after your bath.

Disciple: Mother, your holy feet were worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna himself. We, too, wish to worship them by offering flowers.

Mother: All right, your wish will be fulfilled.

Disciple: Where shall I find flowers?

Mother: The attendants here will procure them for you. We saluted the Mother and returned to the parlour.

The Holy Mother had asked me, "What do they want?", but she did not even mention my case. After returning from the Mother, I felt worried over this omission. At last I pacified myself thinking that whatever the Mother wills, would come to pass. I did not say anything.

The next day after our bath we kept ourselves in readiness with flowers and other materials necessary for spiritual initiation. The Mother said to us, "Come inside one by one." I was the first to enter. It appeared that the Mother had finished her morning worship. As I entered she said, "You will repeat the Mantra that the Master has given you. I, too, shall give you something." With these remarks, she gave me the great Mantra.

Later we worshipped the holy feet of the Mother. She accepted the offerings standing. I said, "Mother, I do not know the rituals." The Mother replied, "Offer the flowers, without any Mantra. That will do." I offered the flowers at her feet uttering 'Jai Ma' (Hail Mother). There was one stramonium flower

amongst them. Pointing to it, she said, 'Don't offer this one, for this is used for the worship of Lord Siva."

I presented her with a rupee and a Sari that I had brought for her. At this the Mother said, "You are in financial difficulties already. Why do you give money?" Strange enough, although there was no talk about the wants in my household, the Mother seemed to know everything about it. I said, "It belongs to you, and it is only being presented to you. If a small fraction of what we earn is used for your service, we shall consider ourselves fortunate." At this the Mother observed, "Ah! What a devotion, my dear!" I said, "Mother, devotees call you Kali, Adyasakti, Bhagavati, etc. In the Gita it is mentioned that the saints Asita, Devala, Vyasa, and others called Sri Krishna as Narayana Himself. Sri Krishna himself told this to Arjuna. By mentioning it himself in the Gita, the idea has been still more emphasized. I believe everything that I have heard about you. Still, if you will please speak of it yourself, my doubts will be dispelled. I want to hear from you directly whether these things are true." "Yes, true they are," said the Mother. After this I never asked the Mother any question relating to her real nature.

I said, "Mother, I want this much—I want to see my Chosen Ideal, touch Him, talk with Him as vividly as I now see you and talk with you. Kindly bless me."

Mother: Well, your wish will be fulfilled.

The next day when I saluted the Holy Mother before taking leave of her, I saw her smiling face and her very graceful appearance. Golap-Ma strongly suggested to me, "Why not visit Puri before going back home?" I replied, "What more would I see? The holy feet of the Mother are a million times more holy to me. I need nothing more." When the Mother heard this, she intervened, "Well, leave it. You need not go there."

I saw the Holy Mother for the second time at the Udbodhan house in May 1912. This time the wife of Rajendra Mukhopadhyaya and my wife received spiritual initiation from her. On this occasion I could not have any significant talk with the Mother on account of Radhu's illness. My mother, grandmother, and two sons, who had accompanied me, were blessed by seeing the Mother and touching her feet.

I saw the Mother next at Jayrambati in 1913. It was three or four days before the marriage of Bhudev, the Mother's nephew. Arriving at the Koalpara Monastery, I heard that one devotee, Dwarakanath Mazumdar, had passed away at Koalpara on his return journey after meeting the Holy Mother. Swami Keshavananda observed, “Mother has prohibited all from going to Jayrambati now. There is a spell of drought there. None should go there before the rains set in." Naturally I became a little worried. I had already covered such a long distance; but then how could I disregard the Holy Mother's instruction and proceed to her place? I took rest after the noon meal. Strangely enough, by the grace of the Mother there came a good shower of rain. The next morning I went to Jayrambati and paid my respects to the Holy Mother. After exchange of a few preliminaries, the Mother said, “My son, we had a nice shower of rain yesterday. It is rather cool today." Referring to the devotee who had recently died, the Mother said, “He died the death of a holy man. I can see him, as it were, even now. But I feel sorry for his bereaved old father." With these words the Mother started weeping.

At that time, Brahmachari Devendranath arrived at Jayrambati, from Varanasi. He used to say that he could know the details of his past life. He had told me four or five years earlier that I was his spiritual preceptor in my previous birth. But I knew nothing about it. I used to laugh away these talks as a mad man's prattle. As soon as both of us presented ourselves before the Mother, she herself said, “Earlier you two were at the same place, and now you have come together once again." Hearing this, Devendra whispered to me, “Look, now do you see that all I told you was true?" I replied, “It may be, but I know nothing of it."

After leaving the Mother, Devendra pleaded with me, “I have come to receive initiation into Sannyasa from the Mother, but my desire won't be fulfilled unless you make a formal request to her. It is owing to the Master's will that I am here now. The Master has brought you too here, because my prayer will not be granted without your consent. At Varanasi I saw Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother in a vision and talked with them." I replied, “I am not going to tell her anything on my own initiative. Let me see what happens." Devendra said, "I say, it won't do."

We had been staying at Jayrambati for seven or eight days. In the meantime Devendra was found to have become quite restless, which struck me as something unusual. However, one morning I saw the Holy Mother all alone

and said, "Mother, can I say something?" Smilingly the Mother replied, "Well, please come a little later when I prepare the vegetables."

After a while the Mother began dressing vegetables. As soon as I went up to her, she said, "You can now tell me what you wanted to say."

I said, "Mother, you are quite aware that the Master appeared before Devendra in a vision. You too blessed him similarly. Now he wishes to take the vow of Sannyasa. He is not going to continue in the worldly life. Then why not please grant him his prayer?" When the Mother heard this, she said smilingly, "If he takes the vow of Sannyasa, will it cause any suffering to others?" I replied, "His parents are already dead. He has one elder brother who has embraced Brahmoism, but he is an earning man. I don't think his Sannyasa will cause suffering to anyone." Then the Mother said, "All right, his prayer will be fulfilled. Get a new cloth dyed ochre from the Koalpara monastery. He will be given Sannyasa tomorrow itself." I disclosed everything to Devendra, who was extremely delighted. All the preparations were made. The next morning the Holy Mother performed the worship in front of the picture of Sri Ramakrishna and handed over to Devendra the new ochre cloth and loin cloth. She asked Devendra to see her after changing into the new clothes. I was then sitting near the Holy Mother brooding over my situation. Just then the Mother, as if understanding my feelings, said tenderly, "Son, will you take the sugar syrup offered to the Master?" "Yes, Mother, give me," I replied.

The Mother herself drank a little of it and lovingly handed over the glass of syrup to me. In drinking the syrup which the Mother also had taken, I considered myself blessed. I thought, "Compared to this good fortune, what is there in Sannyasa? This is not even within the reach of gods!" My heart was filled with a wondrous feeling.

When Devendra entered the room with ochre clothes on and saluted the Holy Mother, she said to me, "Do you see? He is a new man, as it were. He is no more that old self of his."

Uncle Kali, the Mother's second brother, who was also Bhudev's father, began to persuade me to accompany the party in connection with the marriage of his son Bhudev, but I wanted to stay with the Mother. Mother appreciated my attitude and intervened, saying, "No, he need not go. Let him stay here."

Brahmin cooks were busy cooking for the marriage feast. Devendra and I were watching them from a distance. Observing us, the Mother said, "You make fun of them because they do not wear the sacred thread. But who can equal them in cooking?"

As part of the marriage festivities, one of a group of athletes broke into pieces a stone placed on his chest. While he was pounding the stone to pieces, the Mother was constantly praying, "Master, protect him." When the performance was over, the Mother asked me, "My son, do they know some Mantra (esoteric incantation)?" I replied, "No, Mother, there is no such thing behind this display of strength. He has gradually mastered this feat by practice. I once heard a story. An American cowboy used to carry a calf in his arms every day to a far off grazing field. The calf gradually grew into an ox. Still he could carry the ox and used to surprise others by his great strength. All this is the outcome of practice." The Mother observed, "Well, do you see how effective the power of practice is? In the same way, man achieves the highest goal through the practice of Japa. Japa leads to success. Yes, Japa leads to success!"

In the biography of Nag Mahasaya it is mentioned that once the Holy Mother herself fed Nag Mahasaya with some food after herself tasting a bit of it, thus converting it into her Prasada, Overwhelmed by this benevolent gesture of the Mother, Nag Mahasaya said, "Mother is kinder than Father, Mother is kinder than Father!" When I read this portion of the biography, it struck me, "Will the Mother ever feed me in that fashion? But I shall never express this desire to the Mother. Let it happen only if she chooses to do so." Strange enough, one day she fed me with consecrated food in that very way!

At that time a monk, who did not belong to the Ramakrishna Order, but was known to the Holy Mother, came to Jayrambati. One morning I was taking food. The new Swami too was sitting there a little away from me. The Mother said to me, "My son, do you think accepting ochre robes is as simple as that?" Then pointing to the monk, the Mother said, "Just see what he has done." To me she said further, "What's the necessity of the ochre robe? You will have everything even without it."

I had brought a pair of Saris for the Holy Mother. As I presented them to her, I said, "I hear that you distribute presented clothes to others, Mother. But I shall be greatly delighted if you will kindly use these clothes yourself."

When the Mother heard this, she said nothing, but smiled a little. When I went to see her the next day, she said, "Look, my son, I have put on the cloth you had brought."

On my humble supplication the Holy Mother gave me one of her old Saris. While handing it over to me, she said, "It is quite unclean. Please wash it." I said: "No, Mother, I want to preserve it exactly in the condition in which you have presented it to me. I don't want to send it to a laundry." "Well, as you please," replied the Mother.

One day, Devendra and I presented ourselves before the Mother while she was taking her food. The Mother asked, "Would you like to have Prasada?" Both of us extended our hands to receive it. After she had partaken of a small quantity of the food, the Mother gave a good amount of it to each of us. Lest it should fall from our hands, she pressed it placing it on our palms. The Mother belonged to an orthodox Brahmin family and I to a Kayastha. With an utter disregard of the caste rules she touched my hand and began taking her food. Indeed, she looked upon us as her own children.

Whenever I went to see the Holy Mother, I brought fruits or some other articles I could procure. I had heard that the Mother could not offer to Sri Ramakrishna things brought by anybody and everybody, and so I sometimes felt an apprehension whether the Mother would accept our presents because of our not being very pure souls. But I used to feel reassured on the Mother telling, "My son, I presented to the Master the article you had brought. It was quite good, very sweet. I too have partaken of it."

One day I asked her, "Mother, does not the practice of repeating God's name gradually reduce the accumulated effects of a man's past actions?" Everyone must experience the consequence of his past actions," the Mother replied. "Nevertheless, the remembrance of God's name helps one this much—instead of losing a leg one may suffer merely from a thorn entering one's foot."

I said, "Mother, I can hardly perform spiritual practices, and I don't think I shall ever be able to." The Mother assured me saying, "What else will you do? Do what you are doing now. Remember that the Master is behind every one of you. I, too, am behind, you."

One day the Mother observed that Radhu was feeling restless owing to illness. She said to me, "O my son, please see what's the trouble with Radhu." I did not know how to feel the pulse. However, to satisfy the Mother "I felt Radhu's pulse and said, "There is nothing serious. She is somewhat weak. Please give her some milk to drink." The Mother, who was of a childlike nature, immediately began feeding Radhu with milk. After a while Radhu's mother came and seated herself close to Radhu. This made the latter excited; she did not like the idea that her mother should stay nearby. Pushing her a little with her hand, Radhu said, "Please move away." The Holy Mother's hand accidentally touched the feet of Radhu's mother. Being already very much perturbed, she cried out, "Why have you touched my feet? What will become of me now?" The Mother had a hearty laugh at the behaviour of Radhu's mother. Rashbehari-Da, who was standing nearby, said, "Mother, you see how this madcap of a woman speaks ill of you always and even tries to hurt you? But now she seems to be frightened because your hand has touched her feet!"

The Mother said, "In spite of his knowing that Rama was but Narayana, the infinite Brahman, and that Sita was the primordial energy, the Mother of the universe, Ravana nevertheless created so much trouble. Does not the mad woman know who I am? She knows everything; yet she creates all this fun."

Referring to the rheumatic pain in her leg, I told her, "Mother, I hear that your accepting the sins of others is responsible for this illness of yours. I have one earnest prayer to you—kindly do not suffer on my account. Kindly allow me to undergo sufferings for my past deeds." The Mother replied, "How is that possible? Let all be happy, and I shall suffer for them." Ah! What an unfathomable manifestation of compassion I saw in her!

Prior to leaving Jayrambati, as I prostrated before the Mother, she placed her hand on my head and mentally repeated the name of the Lord. Then she said affectionately, "Ah! They feel like staying with me. But what can they do? They have so much of household work to look after!" Expressing her solicitude like the mother of a man bound for a far off country, the Mother walked with me some distance from her house and stood gazing with her eyes full of tears.

Once I stayed in Calcutta for three weeks. I went to the Holy Mother's house at Baghbazar. After making obeisance at her feet, I said, "Mother, I shall be in Calcutta for a few days. A rule has been introduced here permitting

people to see you only twice a week. If you kindly permit me, I shall come to see you now and then." The Mother replied, "Certainly. Come whenever you can and inform me."

During this period, one day I approached her, and said, "Mother, I do not find peace of mind. My mind remains agitated all the time. I am not free from desires." On hearing this, the Mother looked intently at me for a long time, but did not utter a word. Her look of distress brought me remorse. I wondered why I should have told her these things. Taking the dust of her feet, I bade her farewell and went to Master Mahasaya's residence in Guruprasad Chowdhury Lane. I saluted him and said, "You massaged the Master's feet many a time. Kindly stroke my head a little; for I feel greatly agitated." Master Mahasaya replied, "What's this? You are the Mother's son; she loves you dearly. Why should you seek consolation from me? Didn't the Mother cast her benign glance upon you?" "Oh yes, she looked at me for a while," I replied. Thereupon Master Mahasaya said: "What more do you need? If Shyama casts her glance on a man, he swims in Eternal Bliss.'" He emphatically repeated this saying three times. Now I realized the significance of the Mother's looking at me for a while. I became quiet. It now appeared to me that the Mother had sent me to Master Mahasaya just to enable me to understand the meaning of her gracious glance.

Early one morning I went to see the Holy Mother. My wife and one of my daughters accompanied me. I told her, "Mother, my wife and daughter cannot see you often. Permit them to stay with you for the whole day. I shall come in the afternoon to take them home." The Mother agreed. My wife had not put on her forehead the vermilion mark of married women. One of the lady devotees then asked her, "Well, why do you not have a vermilion mark on your forehead?" When the Mother heard this, she said, "What does it matter, if she has not? She has such a noble husband. What if she hasn't worn the mark?" Saying so, the Mother herself put a vermilion mark on my wife's forehead.

My wife was thinking, "If the Mother permits, I shall massage her feet." Strangely enough, the Mother called her after a while and said, "Daughter, please rub some oil on my head and body." While my wife was combing the Mother's hair after putting oil on it, the thought came to her, "Mother permitting, I shall take these hair-strands home." The Mother smiled, and on her own took out the hair-strands from the comb and presented them to my wife saying, "Take these."

A woman devotee asked the Mother, "Who is this daughter?" The Mother replied, "She is the wife of Suren who lives in Ranchi. Suren has great faith in the Master."

That day the Mother took my wife to the Ganges when she went for her bath. The Brahmacharins had mixed up the Sari and towel we had brought for Mother with a few other clothes. But the Mother picked up our Sari and towel when she went for her bath. After the holy bath in the Ganga, the Mother paid one paise to the 'priest at the ghat', saying, "Put a sandal paste mark on the forehead of this daughter."

While taking her meal the Mother gave my wife Prasada from her own plate. After the meal, she asked my wife to massage her feet. My young daughter, who was lying on a piece of blanket, soiled it. My wife was about to wash it when the Mother took it from her and washed it herself. My wife asked, "Well, Mother" why should you wash it?" The Mother replied, "Why should I not, dear? Is not the child my own?"

In the afternoon I went to the Udbodhan Office and found that Upen Babu was the only visitor there. I learned that all the others had gone to attend the celebrations at the Vivekananda Society. I went upstairs straight to the Mother and saluted her. She said, "Look, there is no male attendant here today. Devotees will be coming to see me. Today you will serve as the usher and also distribute Prasada to the devotees." A little later I showed some devotees into the Mother's drawing-room, and after they saluted her, gave them Prasada. Gradually the devotees thinned out, and finally all left.

Mother: Today you have served as a member of this household; you showed the devotees in and gave them Prasada.

Disciple: Why! Don't I belong to your household?

Mother: Yes, that's right. You are my own son.

Saying this, the Mother continued, speaking to my wife, "Yes, dear, all are my children, no doubt. But some of them are specially related. He bears a special relationship with me. Don't you see how he frequents this place? He is close to me."

Then the Mother gave us Prasada and betel leaf. Touching my chin endearingly, she said, "You need have no fear hereafter. Feel quite at ease. This is your last birth."

Disciple: Certainly, your grace makes everything easy.

My wife brought for the Mother an asana which she herself had made. It pleased her very much. Showing it to everyone, she said, "Ah! Look at it. What a beautiful asana my daughter has made." Even a trifling thing from a devotee used to gladden her so much!

Another time I proceeded for Jayrambati in the company of four devotees. We left the monastery at Koalpara early enough to arrive at the house of the Holy Mother before sunset. But we were delayed. Though we had with us a local porter, and though I too was familiar with the place, we took a wrong road when we were close to the Mother's house. We found it difficult to ascertain the road leading to our destination. The local porter too got confused and could not help us. Dusk passed into night and the surroundings were scarcely visible. My companions got bewildered. Finding no other alternative, I spread a blanket in a bamboo grove and sat down. I was overcome with the thought, "Mother, how is it that we alone should search for you, and you yourself should do nothing whatsoever?" Soon after, we noticed Rashbehari-Dada and Hemendra coming, with a lantern in hand. We were amazed at their appearance at such an odd hour. They explained, "We had no plan to come by this road. But luckily we just happened to take this route!"

When we met the Mother and saluted her, she asked, "Well, sons, you have wandered a lot, haven't you?"

Disciple: Yes, Mother, we took a wrong road.

At that time the Mother's new house was being constructed and the two Brahmacharins just mentioned were terribly busy with the work. Two devotees from Sylhet had come. Of the two, one was a devotee of Swami Dayananda of Arunachal. The latter had declared this disciple of his to be an incarnation of Prahlada. I escorted them to the Mother. After they saluted her, I said, "Mother, in Arunachal there is a monk by the name of Dayananda. He proclaims himself to be an incarnation of God. This

gentleman is a disciple of his. Dayananda says he is Prahlada." The Mother laughed and said, "An Incarnation indeed!"

The Mother gave those two devotees spiritual initiation this time. Referring to the monk, I told the Mother that he was giving spiritual initiation to many persons. The Mother said, "They belong more or less to the class of commercial monks. Still, even they bring some good to people. Men normally do not do any spiritual practice. But following the advice of these monks, they will at least do some practice. If one is sincere he will finally come here. Don't you see how the holy name of Tarak Brahma is spreading? Those who have worth in them cannot help but come under its influence."

The Mother initiated all the four companions of mine. One of them was rather young. When his initiation was over, the Mother told him, "Repeat the Mantra one hundred and eight times." But this did not satisfy him. He wanted to chant the holy name one hundred million times a day. Smiling a little, the Mother observed, "Now you are thinking like this. But because of your multifarious duties you can't do that much. Well, it would be fine if you can do more."

One day I procured some lotuses for worshipping the Mother. She said, "Go and offer some to Simhavahini and keep the rest here." One devotee said, "I want to worship you with all the flowers I have brought." To him the Mother replied: "Well, it may be done! But don't you see these old feet of mine? Why would you worship them?"

A number of devotees were near about when I told her, "Mother Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Pure devotion is the essence of all.' You kindly bless me so that I can have that kind of devotion." The Mother kept quiet. The people present gradually left the place. Then the Mother quietly said, "Is it possible for anybody and everybody to have that? But you will have it."

The Mother told Radhu, "Radhu, he is your elder brother. Salute him." I wondered, "How's that! I belong to a Kayastha family. Won't it cause me harm if she, a Brahmana girl, salutes me?" At last both of us saluted each other.

One day I had a great desire to take panthabhat and asked the Mother for it. She said, "Wait for a while. I'll fry hot chillies and pulse-cake in oil. People in your part of the country are very fond of chillies." The Mother mimicked

the tune of a traditional gramophone record, saying, 'I shan't give you even one less than thirty-two chillies.' Saying this, she began to laugh heartily.

Another day at Jayrambati, the Mother said, "I have to face much hardship, you see, all through the day. Devotees come every minute, one batch following another. There is no end to this. This body of mine is almost at the breaking point. Praying to the Master I have somehow fixed my mind on Radhu and thus kept it on the "worldly plane." It struck me that this was parallel to Sri Ramakrishna's keeping his lofty mind on the worldly plane by clinging to such desires as "I shall drink water" or "I shall smoke." Was not the Mother bearing so much trouble for the good of the many?

While taking leave of the Mother, I said, "Mother, you have millions of children like me, but I have not another Mother like you." On hearing this, the Mother with tears in her eyes endearingly fondled me, touching my, chin with her hand.

Once I went to Jayrambati to request the Mother to go to Ranchi for a change of climate after her illness. It was the month of Chaitra (March-April). When she heard this proposal, the Mother remarked, "One should not go out in the month of Chaitra. Even Sarat (Swami Saradananda) came here to escort me to Calcutta and stayed here a long time awaiting my convenience. Calcutta should therefore have my preference."

About that time one of the sisters of Swami Keshavananda died. Referring to this, I observed, "Mother, it is a pity that Swami Keshavananda's mother should suffer bereavement in her old age." The Mother replied, "Bereavement will not upset her peace of mind." On my return journey I met the old lady at Koalpara and found that she had no trace of grief at all. She was all smiles as usual. I wondered, "Even a great sage like Vasishtha experienced bereavement. But here I find the contrary."

Once I called upon the Mother at the Udbodhan house in the company of Sri Rajendra Mukhopadhyaya. When we saluted the Mother, she prayed to Sri Ramakrishna with folded palms, "Master, kindly fulfil all their desires," Thereupon I asked, "How's that Mother? We shall be ruined if all our desires are fulfilled. How many bad desires are there in the heart!"

The Mother laughed and said, "You need not be afraid of that. The Master will grant only those desires which you really need and which will bring you

good. Continue to practise what you are doing now. Why fear? We are with you."

Very early one morning a calf was pitifully crying in the outer courtyard of the Mother's house at Jayrambati. The calf was kept separated from its mother for the purpose of milking the cow. On hearing its cry the Mother rushed out, saying, "I am coming, child, I am coming. I shall release you just now." Coming to the courtyard, she freed the calf. I was wonderstruck on seeing this revelation of the compassion of the Divine Mother towards all beings. Alas! Only such an anguished cry can bring about the release of the soul.

I do not have the language to give expression to the Holy Mother's boundless affection, infinite compassion and limitless kindness. We are all blessed by seeing her lotus feet, touching them, and receiving her grace. Our families have been made holy and our mothers have been blessed. Hundreds of devotees have been turned into gold by this touchstone.

05: Recorded by Brahmachari Ashokakrishna

One morning during her last illness I went to see the Holy Mother. There was no one else in her room at the time. She was staying in the southernmost room. During daytime the Mother's bed used to be spread on the floor of that room. She had been keeping better health for the past few days.

It was the first week of the month of Chaitra (third week of March). As soon as I made salutations to the Mother, she began to enquire about the other members of my family. Seeing her very lean and thin, I said, "Mother, your health has very much deteriorated. I have never seen you so weak before."

The Mother said, "Yes, my son, the body has become quite emaciated. It seems that whatever the Master had wanted to get done through this body has already been accomplished. Now my mind is constantly directed towards him. Nothing else brings happiness to the mind. Look, how dearly I loved Radhu, how much care I took in looking after her. But now all this is changed. Now when Radhu approaches me, I feel uneasy. I feel, why should she try to drag my mind down? For the sake of his work, the Master kept my mind tied down to the world through these aids. Otherwise, would it have been possible for me to continue in this world after he passed away?"

Disciple: Mother, such words from you are very painful to us. If you leave us, what will happen to us? We don't practise austerities. We have hardly any renunciation. If you don't maintain your body for our sake, how shall we get the strength to survive in this realm of Mahamaya? Whenever any weakness would assail my mind, I used to tell you everything and find a way out every time. But where shall we go now? We shall all be helpless.

Mother: What! Why should you be helpless? Does not the Master guide you through good and bad? Why should you be so worried? I have deposited you at his holy feet. You will have to move about within that circle; you can't go beyond it. He is always protecting you.

Disciple: Even though I remember the mercifulness of the Master, I fail to understand it all the time. Though I often have faith in it, I am haunted by doubts at times. But I can see you directly. I tell you everything, and you instruct me on how to follow the best course for my own good. This has instilled in me the conviction that I am under your protection.

Mother: Always remember that the Master is the only protector. If you forget this, you will have trouble. Do you know why I enquired about your family so much? I first heard from Ganen that you had lost your father. So I asked him about the close relations of your mother, whether she has means to maintain herself and whether she can manage her affairs without you. When I heard that she can pull on even without you, I felt relieved and thought, "Well, the boy has taken a good resolve, and now by the grace of the Master he will not face any serious trouble."

She continued, "Everyone should serve his mother, particularly those of you who have come together here to serve all people. Had your father not left behind some wealth, I would have asked you to earn money with which to serve your mother. It is by the will of the Master that you are not burdened by any such trouble. It will be enough if you can make some arrangement, so that the family property is not squandered while under the management of a woman. As for yourself, you are in a very advantageous position. Men can hardly earn money through honest means, and even this contaminates their mind very much. That's why I advise you to settle these monetary affairs as early as possible. Money is such a thing that one develops an attachment for it, if one is associated with it for long! You may think that you have no attachment for it, that since you have renounced it once for all you will not get attached to it, that you will be able to be free from it whenever you wish. Oh, no! Never harbour such an idea in your mind. Money will find its way somehow to grip you unawares by the neck, as it were. I am telling this particularly to you who belong to Calcutta—you are free with money, aren't you? Settle your family affairs as early as possible and leave Calcutta. And if you can take your mother to some place of pilgrimage, both of you will be able to call upon God, forgetting the mother-and-son relationship. It will be nice if you can arrange it now while your mother is mourning. She is already aged. Try to explain your intention to her. Discuss this with her.

"You will play the true role of a son only if you can help her acquire the means for her higher evolution in the hereafter. Don't forget that you have grown up by sucking the milk of her breasts. Remember with what difficulty she tended you. To serve her is your highest religion. It would be different, of course, if she stands in the way of your progress towards God. Please bring your mother here once. I want to see what she is like. If I find her helpful to you, I shall give her some advice. But beware; don't engage yourself in worldly affairs under the cover of serving your mother. The real

issue is to provide board and lodging for her because she is a widow. Is a big amount of money necessary for this? Try your utmost to quickly settle these affairs, even if there be some monetary loss. The Master could not touch money at all. Since you have renounced everything to realize the Master's ideal, always remember his words. Money is at the root of all evil in this world. At your tender age, your mind will easily feel tempted if you possess some money. Beware!"

Disciple: I thought of bringing my mother to you one day. But considering the present condition of your health, I don't dare to bring her here. ¬

Mother: No, no, bring her one day. Many people are coming. The condition of this body will deteriorate day by day. Bring her once very soon. I don't feel too bad in the mornings. Can you not bring her in the morning one day? Don't be too late in the day; otherwise the attendant may not permit her to see me.

Disciple: Mother, your words are very painful to me. Your repeated mention of your health suggests that you don't desire to keep your body any more.

Mother: The continuation of this body is not under my control; it all depends on His will. Why are you all so impatient? How long do you really stay near me? You stay at the Math (Belur Math) sometimes, or somewhere else at other times. How many of you find an opportunity to speak to me or stay near me? You don't even care to inform me of your whereabouts.

Disciple: Yes, it is true that there is hardly any scope for our staying with you, but we know in our heart of hearts that you are here. Whenever any weakness assails us, we rush to you, and we are relieved.

Mother: Suppose the Master lets this body of mine perish—do you think I can be free even then so long as a single person of whom I have taken charge remains in bondage? I shall have to be with them all. I have taken the responsibility for their well-being. Giving initiation is no joke. One has to bear on one's shoulders such a big burden, you see! How much I have to worry over them. Just see, when your father expired, I felt very sad. I thought, the Master has again put this young man, to the test. I worried as to how you would manage in this situation. That was why I talked with you so long. Do you really understand everything? If you could, the burden of my worries would have diminished. The Master is sporting with different people

in different ways. And now, you see, I have to bear the brunt of it all! Surely, I cannot leave those whom I have accepted as my own.

Disciple: Mother, I become frightened whenever I wonder what will happen to us when you are gone. Whom shall we approach in your place?

Mother: My son Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) and others are there. Are they any the less worthy? You dearly love Rakhal also. You can seek his help. Besides, what else have you got to ask? To question too much is not good. It is difficult to properly assimilate even one thought. Now why should you trouble your mind by harbouring ten thoughts? Dive deep with the noble idea that you have received. Repeat the holy Name, meditate upon it, keep good company, and subdue the ego by all means. Do you see the child-like nature of Rakhal, as if he is still a young boy? Don't you see Sarat (Swami Saradananda), who does so much work, bearing all tribulations silently? Being a monk, he has no need for all these troubles. These monks can fix their minds on God all the time if they so wish. They bring their minds down only for your welfare. Keep them before you as an ideal and serve them. And make it a point to remember always whose child you are, who has granted refuge to you. Whenever any evil thought haunts you, tell your mind: 'Being her child, can I stoop so low as to indulge in any such activity?' You will find that you gain strength and peace of mind.

06: Recorded by Prabodh Babu and Manindra

I first saw the Holy Mother in 1907. It was during the rainy season of 1908 that I saw her for the second time. This time I arrived at Jayrambati at about 11.30 a.m. After I saluted her, the Mother asked, "Are you a pupil of Master Mahasaya?"

Disciple: No, Mother, but I visit him frequently.

Mother: How is he? Have you seen him recently?

Disciple: He is keeping fine. I met him only eight days back.

While I was taking my noon meal, I asked the Mother, "Will you be going to Calcutta now?"

Mother: I wish to visit Calcutta during the Durga Puja holidays. Then whatever the Divine Mother wills. . . . Do you get paddy from your landed property?

Disciple: Yes, Mother.

Mother: Good. We don't get good quality paddy in this part of the country. Do you grow Kalai pulse?

Disciple: Yes, Mother.

Mother: That's fine. While I was taking my night meal, the Holy Mother asked, "Do you stay at home now?"

Disciple: Yes, Mother, I am living at home now. I am in grave danger. I had a serious illness, and it has been followed by my marriage.

Mother: How old is the bride?

Disciple: She is about thirteen.

Mother: What has happened is for good, certainly. What can you do?

Disciple: Master Mahasaya asked me not to marry.

Mother: Ah! He himself has suffered much. That's why he says, "None of you should marry."

Disciple: Worldly life is a great impediment. Engrossed in worldly life, one loses one's manliness.

Mother: Surely. There is only one cry—money, money, money.

Disciple: It is very painful.

Mother: The Master has householder devotees too. Why do you worry?

In spite of these words I was still worried. After a while the Mother said, "My brothers too are married."

Disciple: Did they marry with your consent?

Mother: What is to be done? The Master used to say, "The worms seen in excreta thrive well there, but if kept in a pot of rice, they will simply die." These days nieces do not serve their uncles as sincerely as we used to do.

Disciple: Things are changing gradually.

Mother: That's true. Don't you see? Formerly I couldn't kill even an ant, but these days I sometimes beat a cat! The Master used to say, "Tuhu, Tuhu"—"Thou, Thou!" He meant that only after terrible sufferings does a man resort finally to "Thou, Thou (Lord, Lord)." Selfishness—well, it persists as long as a person is self-assertive, but not when that is overcome. Why entertain any fear? All conditions can turn favourable by the will of the Master. Perhaps your wife has some good deeds to her credit. The Master used to say, "Avidya is more powerful than vidya." That is why avidya maya has kept the world enchanted.

It was Sunday, 20 April 1919. The Holy Mother was staying at Jagadamba Ashrama at Koalpara in the district of Bankura. At about ten in the morning Manindra, Satu, Narayana Iyengar and others had come to salute the Holy Mother. The Mother had been staying here for more than a month. The male devotees were staying and taking their meals at the Koalpara monastery.

The son of the Holy Mother's niece Maku was seriously ill at Jayrambati; he was suffering from Diphtheria. The child was under the treatment of Vaikuntha Maharaj (Swami Mahadevananda). The Mother was terribly worried as to what might happen to the child. This topic came up for discussion as soon as the devotees took their seats after saluting the Mother. Narayana Iyengar said, "Mother, the child will be cured through your blessings." The Mother folded her palms and pointing to the picture of the Master inside the room said, “He is superintending everything."

Satu: He (Narayana Iyengar) has done a lot for Maku's child. He sent a messenger to Calcutta to bring injections for Diphtheria as well as other things.

Mother: Yes, he is a noble soul. He has spent money to send Kalo to Calcutta. Who would have done all this, had he not been here?

Narayana Iyengar: I am the machine and the Master is the engineer. He is driving me like a machine.

Mother: The Master used to say, "He who possesses food and money may distribute them to the poor. He who does not have, should give himself to repeating the name of the Lord."

Narayana Iyengar: Is it necessary to wash oneself before doing Japam?

Mother: Yes, washing is necessary when Japa is practised at home. But it will be sufficient just to repeat the holy Name during journeys or walks.

Narayana Iyengar: Only the repetition of the holy Name? Not even the repetition of the Mantra?

Mother: Yes, you should certainly repeat the Mantra also. However, calling upon God with one's mind steadfast is equivalent to a million repetitions of the Mantra. What is the good in doing Japa for a whole day if there is no concentration of mind? Collectedness of one's mind is essential, and then only His grace descends.

Narayana Iyengar: Whatever I am doing, is it sufficient or do I need to do something more?

Mother: Continue to practise what you are doing. You are already a recipient of His grace.

Narayana Ivengar: One can have a vision of God if one earnestly calls upon Him for two or three days at a stretch. I am calling upon Him for so long. Why do I not have His vision?

Mother: Yes, you will have it. The utterances of lord Siva and the words of the Master-they cannot be untrue. The Master told Surendra Mitra, "He who has wealth should distribute it, and he who has not, should do Japa."

Drawing the attention of all present, the Mother said further, "If you can't do even that, then take refuge in the Master. Remember this much: 'I have someone to look after me. There is certainly a Mother or Father.'"

Narayana lyengar: Since you are telling this, we cannot but accept it and have faith in it.

Radhu had given birth to a child. Since the birth of the baby, Radhu was lying ill. It was time to feed Radhu. The Mother got up and said, "Now I shall go to feed Radhu." The devotees finished prostrating at the Holy Mother's feet. Narayana Iyengar saluted the Holy Mother touching her feet. The Mother blessed him by touching his head.

When Manindra bowed at her feet, the Mother said, "What a strong faith your mother has! When asked to visit Varanasi, she remarked, 'This is my Varanasi, I shall not go anywhere else.'"

Manindra's mother, who used to live with the Holy Mother, had died more than a year earlier. She had served the Holy Mother very devotedly. The Mother had told her, "None except Kedar's mother and you could stay here for long."

As dusk approached, news reached that the condition of Maku's son had become precarious. This made the Holy Mother very anxious. She told Brahmachari Varada, "Keep the palanquin ready. If the boy survives the night, I shall go to see him tomorrow morning. But how shall we get news of the child early tomorrow morning?"

Manindra: Satu and I shall bring the news early tomorrow morning.

After a while Vaikuntha Maharaj returned from Jayrambati. On hearing this, the Mother started and asked, "Is not the child alive?" Finding all silent, the Mother asked once again, "When did he pass away?"

Vaikuntha Maharaj: At half past five.

Mother: Can I see him if I go there now?

Vaikuntha Maharaj: No, Mother, the dead body has been removed.

Mother began to cry profusely. If she stopped crying for a while, she would begin again all the more. When Swami Kesavananda tried to pacify her, she cried out, "O Kedar, I cannot forget the child."

Once when the boy and his mother Maku were about to start for Jayrambati, he collected a few wild roses and placed them at the Mother's feet saying, "Look, Auntie! How beautiful they look!" Then the boy bowed down and took the dust of the Mother's feet. Afterwards he picked up the flowers, put them into his pocket, and left for Jayrambati. Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) dearly loved the boy. During his illness, the boy called out, "Red Uncle! Red Uncle!" referring to the Swami's saffron cloth. Now, the Mother observed, "May be, some devotee had been reborn as he. But this must have been his last birth. Otherwise, how could you explain the kind of intelligence the boy showed or the way he used to perform his Puja at the age of three? I brought him up and hence the "loss is so terrible to me." The weeping and wailing continued until late in the night. At the dead of night the Mother asked the women if they had taken their night meal. When she heard that they had not taken any food, because she had not taken, she took a little milk and two luchis. The next day during the evening hours Manindra and Prabhakar went to see the Mother. She was very gloomy on account of the premature death of Maku's child. Now the conversation turned to that topic.

Mother: The child once asked me, "Who created red flowers?" I replied, "The Master has made them." He then asked, "Why?" I told him, "Because he wanted to wear them." The death of the child will cause deep sorrow to Sarat. Sarat used to place the child on his lap without caring about the pain in his leg. Once while seated on Sarat’s lap, the boy asked him, "Where is

your Mother?" Pointing to Maku, Sarat said, "Here is my mother." Then the boy said, "No, your mother has gone to the school building." About that time, the Holy Mother lived along with the ailing Radhu in the boarding house of Nivedita's school; for Radhu could not stand the noise of the Udbodhan House.

Manindra: The Master too suffered terribly on the death of Akshay.

Mother: The Master said, "The pang in my heart was like the wringing of a towel" One of my nephews named Dinu used to worship in the Vishnu temple. Hriday used to worship in the Kali temple. Dinu would entertain the Master by singing "Yasoda used to rock you by calling you Nilamani" and such other songs. Then, Akshay had an attack of cholera.

Manindra: Were you then living at Dakshineswar?

Mother: Yes, I was staying in the Nahabat. The dust of the Master's feet, the dust of my own feet, and the water with which the image of Mother Kali had been bathed were offered to Akshay but to no avail. He didn't survive. The Master suffered much anguish.

"My youngest brother passed the Entrance Examination creditably. Afterwards he was studying medical science and was doing fairly well. When he went to see Naren, the latter asked, 'Well, does the Mother have such a person as her brother? Almost all of them are priests, earning a living through that profession:' He further said to him, 'You will have to operate on abscesses in the stomach.' Naren said to Yogen (Swami Yogananda), 'You will have to meet his (the Mother's brother's) educational expenses.' However, Yogen died. Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) bought books worth forty rupees for my brother. Rakhal and Sarat used to play cards with him. But that brother of mine passed away early.

"The world is a fetter of Maya. . . (In a pitiful voice) Ah! Maku had a child who was so helpless that he couldn't even turn from one side to another by himself. Just imagine! How painful it was!

"In bringing up this girl Radhu, I have had to endure so much pain. Well, one cannot escape it. When Radhu was born to Surabala (Chota Bau) my mother said, 'Chota-Bau's mother wants to take her (Surabala) home. Why not let her do so?' Then at the time of my morning worship in Calcutta I had

a vision which appeared to me in the way a drop-scene appears at a theatrical performance (making a gesture with both her hands). I saw the mother of Radhu in distress at her village home. I saw Radhu lying in the courtyard and picking up from a mass of straw and dust strewn all around, a few grains of puffed rice given to her by her mother and eating them. Radhu's mother had her arms wound with red and blue threads, just as a mad woman could have. The other children of the family, I noticed, were taking puffed rice and other things along with sweets. Seeing this I almost started gasping. I felt choked like a person forcibly kept under water. Then I realized that Radhu's condition would be like what I saw if I left her in the hands of her mother."

The Holy Mother dearly loved her youngest brother Abhay. She had brought her brothers up. On his death bed Abhay had said, "Sister, I am leaving behind everything. Please look after them." Radhu was then in her mother's womb. After her confinement, Radhu's mother came to Calcutta along with the Holy Mother. Subsequently she turned insane and was sent to Jayrambati. Radhu had to endure so much of tribulations there. One morning when the Holy Mother was performing her worship in her rented house in Baghbazar, she had that vision of Radhu. Remembering the last words of Abhay, she returned to Jayrambati in a few days' time. The Mother used to say, "Through this girl I have been caught in the snares of Maya." At some other time the Holy Mother was lying seriously ill at Koalpara. One day all on a sudden Radhu left for Jayrambati with the idea of visiting her father-in-law's house. Before leaving, she said to the Mother, "You have so many devotees to look after you but who have I except my husband?" Referring to this incident, the Mother said, "The way Radhu threw away the bondage of my attachment yesterday and went to her husband's home worried me. I said to myself that perhaps the Master does not want me to live any longer." The Mother further said, "My constant doting on Radhu uttering 'Radhi, Radhi' is nothing but a form of Maya with which I am bound."

The twilight of dusk was advancing towards the darkness of night. Manindra and Prabhakar were getting ready to take leave of the Mother. They wanted to reach Arambagh that very night. The Mother said: "You take some food and go."

Prabhakar: We have come here after taking our food.

Mother: Won't you please take at least some little refreshment? Dear, please bring some sweets for them.

She later told us, "You should take food and some rest before you leave."

Manindra: Yes, Mother.

Mother: Have you hired a cart?

Manindra: Yes.

When we saluted her while taking leave, she blessed us saying, "May your mind be inclined towards God."

Mahindra: May our bond of Maya break asunder.

On hearing this, the Mother cast an approving glance.

23rd April 1919.

When the devotees went to prostrate at the feet of the Holy Mother, Narayana Iyengar told her, "Mother, your mind is now disturbed because of the premature death of Maku's son. I am therefore thinking of leaving this place soon."

Mother: Joy and sorrow, where will they go? They are our companions. Why should you worry about it? Stay here. You may leave this place on the 4th or 5th of Jaistha (May).

Monday, 12 Jaistha (May-June)

Swami Santananda and Swami Harananda had come from Varanasi. Manindra, too, had come again. In the morning Swami Santananda and Manindra went to salute the Holy Mother. The devotees were put up in the Koalpara monastery and the Mother was staying in the Jagadamba Ashrama.

Santananda: How is your health, Mother?

Mother: I am keeping all right.

One young man, released from internment, had come there the previous day. Anticipating trouble from the police, the devotees tried to send him away then and there. When the Mother was asked about it, she said, "Keep him here for the day. He will go away tomorrow." Swami Kesavananda, instead of keeping the young man in the monastery, placed him somewhere else; for the village policeman used to visit the monastery every evening and record the names and addresses of new arrivals. The next day the Mother enquired about the young man. "Where is that young man? Has he already left?" she asked.

Manindra: He hasn't left. He will go after his noon meal.

Mother (to Swami Santananda): Where did he spend the night?

Santananda: I -don't know, Mother. He didn't tell me.

Mother: Do you have rain in Varanasi also, when the monsoon sets in here?

Santananda: No, Mother. There the rainy season begins in the month of Sravan (July-August). But in some years storms take place in the month of Vaisakh (March-April) and destroy the mango and other crops. The old women who, go to Varanasi with the desire of dying there suffer terribly. Sometimes the remittance from home is stopped. Besides, they have to live in damp dark rooms on the ground floor.

Mother: Yes, I myself saw the extent of their suffering when I stayed in the house of Bansi Dutta at Varanasi. I saw them taking a small quantity of rice procured by begging and soaked in water. They didn't cook.

Santananda: Many old women live long, although they go there to die early.

Mother: They earn remission of their sins by seeing and touching Lord Viswanath, and thereby they live long. In Vrindaban, people take consecrated food and sprinkle holy water from a conch on their body; so they live long.

Mother then turned the conversation to the topic of Radhu. She said, "I wish Radhu would overcome her physical weakness now and get up. Her bedroom still serves as her bathroom. I don't know what the Master will do—how long he will keep me like this!" Then she began telling Swami

Santananda about Maku's son. "Nothing else overwhelms a man like mourning. Sarat too suffered much on account of Maku's son. Kalo was sent to Calcutta to bring medicine for him. These people here advised him not to meet Sarat. I intervened, saying, 'How can it be that he will go to Calcutta and not meet Sarat?' "

Manindra: Yes, Sarat Maharaj wrote, "Let Kalo come straight to me." Mother was dressing vegetables. Pointing to the chelo (a local vegetable) Swami Santananda observed, "This vegetable is not found in Calcutta."

Mother: It can be prepared as a curry fried in a little oil and also as a sauce. It is a good vegetable, as it is cooling to the system. (Turning to Manindra) Is it available in Jehanabad?

Manindra: Yes, Mother.

Swami Santananda raised the topic of the people's suffering. He said, "I hear that six million people have died of influenza. Paddy and rice are costly—people are suffering much."

Mother: Yes, my son. People don't have enough to eat. Those who have children suffer all the more. In fact, this is only the beginning of their suffering. It will end only if there is an abundant paddy crop after a good rain. I heard that some European officer had come to Calcutta. He wanted to ban the movement of paddy and rice from one place to another. He has left, I am told.

Manindra: That attempt is still being made.

Swami Santananda: The suffering of the people is on the increase. Is this the outcome of men's Karma, Mother?

Mother: How can this be the Karma of so many people? It seems something is wrong.

Swami Santananda: World War I is over. Why then are goods not sold at a cheaper price?

Mother: How is it that people are saying the War has begun once again?

Swami Santananda: They mean in Kabul. So much of suffering, fighting, and killing! Will this usher in a new age, Mother?

Mother (smiling): How can I say? How can I know what will happen by His will? The sin of a king brings ruin to his kingdom. Malice, deceit, and killing of holy men-these are all sins. These lead to the suffering of the people and cause providential disturbances like war, earthquake, and famine. War ceases as soon as all the parties calm down a little.

"Ah, how nice was Queen Victoria, the Empress of India! How happily and comfortably people lived then! Now, even a boy of five realizes the pang of suffering; for he complains of having no clothes to wear. Well, how much rice has already been distributed by Sarat?"

Manindra: I can't say exactly how much rice has been distributed. But rice worth thirty-four rupees is distributed every week among the distressed.

Mother: How much rice does every person receive?

Manindra: Everybody receives one quarter of a seer (equivalent to 0.930 kilogram).

Mother: How much does a family get?

Manindra: Six, seven or eight seers according to the size of the family.

Mother: How many people have received the dole?

Manindra: I don't know exactly. But the Muslim women constitute the largest number.

Mother: Yes, the Mohammedans are poorer here. Well where else is Sarat distributing relief?

Manindra: At Bankura, Indpur, and Manbhum. Relief is being given wherever there is famine.

Mother: Are my sons working there?

Swami Santananda: Yes, they are going from the Math.

Manmdra: Indpur is the place where Satu was expected to go.

Mother: Satu's sister has been married to a man of Shihar.

Manindra: Yes, Mother. As Satu did not go to the marriage festival, his parents.

Mother: Yes, they are sorry. That is natural. But how can a monk participate in a marriage ceremony? He will go there at some other time. It will be nice if Prabhakar's son turns out to be good. The Master used to say, "Everything in the world is jugglery. Though a jugglery, it is unfortunate that men are not aware of it."

In the afternoon of the 16th of Ashada (June-Jury) Manindra, Prabhakar, and Prabodh Babu of Shyambazar (Fului Shyambazar) came to see the Mother. As soon as Prabhakar saluted her, she asked, "Is your son all right? I heard that he was ill."

Prabhakar: He is all right.

Mother: When did you arrive here? Have you - taken your lunch?

Prabhakar: Yes.

Manindra and Prabodh Babu wanted to get their daughters admitted into the Nivedita School. Prabodh Babu raised the topic, asking for the Mother's approval.

Mother: That's right. Write to Sarat.

Prabodh Babu: We have written to him already.

A woman devotee: Will they be able to stay there? They are too young.

Mother: Certainly they will. Girls of six or seven from East Bengal live there. They don't like to leave their hostel even when their parents come.

Prabodh Babu: I went to see the conditions in my native village today. The sufferings of the people are terrible. Men and women don't have even

clothes to wear-they couldn't present themselves before us. Thatching can hardly be found on their house-tops.

Mother: Have you (i.e. the Panchayat Board of which he was the President) distributed rice to those people?

Prabodh Babu: It was distributed yesterday.

Mother: Do you distribute clothes?

Prabodh Babu: We distribute clothes selectively. Mother, I hear that you had seen in a dream a woman standing with a pitcher and a broomstick.

Mother: Yes, I saw a woman standing with a pitcher and a broomstick in her hands. I asked her, "Who are you?" She, said, "I shall sweep off everything." Then I asked, "What will happen next?" She replied, "I shall sprinkle the contents of this pitcher of nectar." It seems that this vision is coming true. I heard from my mother that when famine sets in, it continues for three consecutive years. Has it continued for two years now?

Manindra: War has been going on for a long time:

Mother: There has been war for the last four or five years. That's something different. Has the famine continued for two years? If so, it may last for one year more.

The Mother then asked, "What's the price of paddy?" She was told the price in terms of the local rate.

Mother: Is it so costly? And everything else—cloth, oil, and all such things—must also be expensive. Those who have these things are also likely to be worried. This time "I shall eat your skin, and you will eat mine." One has to gracefully accept the sorrows and miseries that God is bestowing. Whatever He wills comes to pass.

Prabodh Babu: Mother, since even you have to suffer so much, what hope is there for others?

Mother: It's as if I have been put in a cage. I can't move about; there is no way for me to escape.

Prabodh Babu: Problems have again cropped up regarding the plot of land owned by the Master's family at Kamarpukur.

Mother: Who is creating the problems? Is it Mahim Babu?

Prabodh Babu: No, Fakir Babu and Hem Babu.

Mother: What's the point in these trifles? Will the shifting of the boundary fence solve the problem?

Prabodh Babu: I have already fixed posts at the four corners of the plot. The area goes up to the road. Mahim Babu is rather pleased with the arrangement. We would have done better to fix the boundary posts, a little further ahead. Then in the event of their raising objections, these could be moved back gradually. When one has to deal with such a businessman; one has to apply the same kind of intelligence.

On hearing this strange solution to the problem, the Mother laughed heartily.

Prabodh Babu: I have written to Sarat Maharaj. We shall do whatever he advises.

Mother: Formerly a day-labourer used to earn four paise a day. I still remember when people used to write letters on large pieces of paper and send them to Calcutta by messengers who walked the whole distance. There was no postal arrangement.

Prabodh Babu: Now the postal system has made things convenient, Mother.

Mother: That's true. I am only narrating some details about the olden days. One could get a large quantity of oil for one rupee. Now a handful of paddy sells for one rupee. People are disposing of their stock of paddy, for it fetches them a good amount of money. Even the small quantity of paddy that is left cannot be stored for very long, for they have to use it for their own consumption. They have to appease their hunger. Prasanna sold paddy worth four to five hundred rupees. A portion of his remaining stock was pilfered. Raj Ghosh too has sold out his large stock of paddy. He received a letter saying, "There will be a robbery in your house unless you pay a certain

amount." He produced the letter before the police. Perhaps some local ruffian played this trick.

When Manindra and Prabodh Babu went to salute the Holy Mother, Prabodh Babu asked her, "Mother, should anyone leave the worldly life forcibly?"

Mother (smiling): Some persons are actually doing so, my dear.

Prabodh Babu: One perhaps runs into difficulty if one renounces the world whimsically without obtaining the grace of Mahamaya.

Mother: Such a person returns to the world.

* * *

Manindra: Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) also suffered terribly. But he was able to overcome his suffering and his physique could withstand the tribulations.

Mother: No, he too had to suffer much from urinary trouble (diabetes). He had a burning sensation all over his body. In spite of his bad health, he 'spilt his blood' in hard work.

Manindra: Did he actually lose blood?

Mother: No, he didn't. But he worked so hard that he almost bled.

Prabodh Babu: I have heard that once at Darjeeling, Swamiji put his arm around the neck of Hari Maharaj and shed tears, saying, "Brother, are you all to concern yourselves just with religious practices? See, I alone am working myself to death."

Mother: Yes, my son, he shed his blood for the sake of others. It is Naren who on his return from abroad did all this. That is how these young men have come to find a shelter. Four of them are now preaching in foreign lands?

Prabodh Babu: Yes, Swami Abhedananda, Swami Prakashananda, Swami Paramananda, and Swami Bodhananda.

Mother: What's the Sannyasa name of Kali?

Manindra: Swami Abhedananda.

Mother: Vasanta (Swami Paramananda) writes letters to people here and sends them money. He delivers lectures there. . . . Yogen (Swami Yogananda) practised much austerity. At places of pilgrimage he used to store dried crumbs of bread. He took a small quantity of this daily along with water held in his cupped palms. As a result of this he had some serious stomach trouble. It resulted in his premature death. . . . Is there happiness in the world? There is and again, there isn't. The world is like a tree of poison. Poison permeates the whole of worldly life. But those who have plunged into worldly life—what else can they do now? Even if they understand the implications of worldly life, they can't act otherwise.

After saluting the Holy Mother the devotees returned to the Koalpara monastery. Manindra and Prabodh Babu went to the Holy Mother again in the afternoon.

Prabodh Babu: Sarat Maharaj has replied to my letter. Should I read it out?

Mother: Yes, read it.

Prabodh Babu read it out. Among other things he had written, "What can be done even if I agree? As regards keeping Prabodh Babu's daughter Bina here, (i.e. at the Nivedita Girls' school) the Master's will is otherwise."

Mother: Well, why has Sarat written in this way? He has closed the topic entirely. It must be that Sudhira did not agree. Sudhira told me, "Mother, I can't pull on any more. I am suffering very heavily." What an amount of trouble she takes for the girls. When she fails to meet the expenditure of the girls, she earns forty or fifty rupees per month by giving music lessons to the girls of well-to-do families. She has taught the girls of her school sewing, dress-making, and other skills. The institution earned three hundred rupees the other year and utilized it for the girls' travelling expenses during the Puja vacation. Sudhira is the sister of Debabrata (Swami Prajnananda). Keeping himself in the background, he taught his sister how to purchase a ticket in a railway station, how to board a train without anybody's help, and so on. In the Nivedita School there are two unmarried girls from Madras between twenty and twenty-two years old. Ah! How nicely they have learnt to do

various kinds of jobs. And then, just think of our girls! Here in this wretched part of the country, people insist on a girl getting married as soon as, or even before, she is eight years old. Ah! Radhu would not have been in such a miserable plight had she not been married!

07: Recorded by an Anonymous Lady Devotee

It was the fifteenth day of Poush, 1320, of the Bengali calendar (A.D. 1914). I had been feeling a great desire to meet the Holy Mother, but I had had no opportunity of calling on her. Who would escort me to her place? I had finally resigned myself to the thought that I would see her only if she made circumstances favourable, when Kamala and Bimala came and said, "Sister, our mother is calling you." At these words it occurred to me that this might lead to the fulfilment of my desire. Someone whispered into my ear, as it were, "Oh, dear! Mother is calling you."

I hurriedly' got ready and arrived at the house of Bimala at about 7 o'clock in the morning. I found that Lalit and his mother were having a chat. On seeing me Lalit's mother said, "So, here is Binu. See, my darling, how crazy she is! She got the news and came here right away." Lalit asked, "Do you wish to visit the Holy Mother, Sister? If so, I can escort you to her today." "That would be a wonderful favour!" I replied. I could hardly believe the good news that I was really going to see the Holy Mother. So I told Lalit, "Brother, please tell me, are you really going? If you are, then please hire a hackney carriage." I then asked him, "Have you yourself seen the Mother?" With great joy Lalit replied, "I went to see the Mother only once. Ah! What can I say of her kindness and deep affection towards us? The Mother asked us to call on her again."

Lalit now went out to hire a carriage. Before going he said, "I am going to bring a carriage. All of you please get ready." Shortly afterwards, Lalit's mother, Lalit's sisters, and I left for the Mother's place. Panchu too accompanied us.

Parul said to me, "Sister, are you sure that the Mother is now staying at the Udhodhan house?" I was startled; for, I really did not know whether the Mother was in Calcutta. I began to worry and to pray mentally to the Master, "O Lord! Please don't disappoint me'." Our carriage arrived at the Udbodhan Office at 10 o'clock. As soon as it stopped, I hurriedly got out and went inside without greeting the Swamis who were working in the room on one side. The world seemed to me to be rather empty and meaningless. I didn't know what I would do if I were to hear that the Mother was not there. I was very anxious. I asked everybody I came across "Is the Mother here?" But the Swamis did not give any reply. Instead they quietly went away with their

heads lowered. In the meantime, Lalit had alighted from the carriage and gone straight upstairs. I was following in his footsteps, when he returned to announce, "The Mother is here." I was relieved of the cloud of anxiety which had been hanging over my mind. Now I went slowly to meet the Holy Mother. Leaving the front room on the right side, I proceeded along the balcony on the left. I found a woman standing with her face half veiled. As I noticed two or three devotees making salutations to her, I knew her to be no other than the Holy Mother. It was only to see her that I had rushed all the way from my home. I really don't remember what I did in those moments. On seeing me, the male devotees left the place. I rushed towards the Mother, caught hold of her feet and sat down on the floor. The Mother asked, "Where do you come from? Why have you come here?" I replied, "Mother, I really don't know why I have come. Mother, I am here because you have brought me."

By this time Lalit's mother and the others had entered the room. Standing there for a while, one of them asked, "Is she the Holy Mother?" I nodded. Everybody present made salutations to her. Then the Mother went into the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna. We followed her and made obeisance to the Master. The Mother sat on the wooden cot in front of the altar and said, "Sit down, dear, sit down." We all sat at her feet. Lalit's mother was a housewife. The Mother began to converse with her like an ordinary worldly woman.

Lalit's mother: Mother, kindly tell us a few things about Sri Ramakrishna. We are householders. Kindly give us some instructions.

Mother: I know nothing except what I directly heard from the Master. Well, my darling, read the Kathamrita (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna) and you will find all the necessary instructions there.

After paying the carriage fare, Lalit came straight to the Mother. He prostrated himself, placing his head on her feet, and began shedding tears profusely and praying pitifully, "Be gracious, O Mother, Thou embodiment of mercy! Mother, you are here to save the world. Kindly give me shelter. I shall not leave your feet. You must grant me refuge." He went on imploring like this. The Mother was all along standing like a statue. After a while, she said, "Please don't be so impatient. Get up, child."

Lalit was a boy of fifteen or sixteen. His latent spiritual nature was beginning to unfold. He was dark-complexioned and well-built. He was full

of devotion to God, and his behaviour often exhibited it. Again he began shedding tears, saying, "Kindly grant me refuge at your holy feet, Mother. Kindly say, 'Yes'. Graciously say that you have accepted me, otherwise I shall not get up."

At this moment his feet touched an earthen pot containing clarified butter. He immediately shrank in self-condemnation and said, "What a sin have I committed! Someone gave the Mother this clarified butter with great reverence and now my wretched feet have touched it. Alas! What have I done?" In this way he was lamenting when one fair-complexioned old lady who was busy working in the shrine said, "Well, son, you need not fret. What if your feet have touched that pot? Your feet are not something outside of the universe. The two legs of men are parts of creation. The legs are a part and parcel of the human body." We glanced at her. The calmness on her face and her simple and meaningful words deeply impressed us. Lalit was pacified to some extent, and regaining his composure, he saluted the Holy Mother, saying, "Mother, kindly bless me." "The Master will bless you"—saying this the Mother placed her hand on Lalit's head. Pacified, he went downstairs.

About this time a middle-aged man appeared at the door of the Mother's room. He was holding the hand of a young woman about sixteen or seventeen years old. He said, "Mother, she is my daughter. Her baby died this morning, and she is grief-stricken. I have brought her here hoping that you will be able to console her." These words made us all apprehensive.

Mother: Come here, darling.

The young woman entered the room and sat close to the Holy Mother. As she extended her hand to touch Mother's feet in respectful salutation, the Mother moved away a little and said, "Well, should she touch me? She is now in a period of mourning." These words of the Holy Mother made the woman's face all the more pale. Feeling embarrassed, she quietly moved a little away. As the Holy Mother looked at her face, her heart was filled with compassion. She said, "Ah, my poor girl! You have suffered much, so you have come to me for solace. And who knows how much I have hurt your feelings? Well, what does it matter if you are observing a period of mourning? Come, my dear, touch my feet" With these kind words the Mother came closer to the young woman. With her eyes full of tears the girl reverently placed her head on the Mother's feet. And the Mother blessed her

by placing her hand on the girl's head. Sitting close to the girl, the Mother began to comfort her, saying, "What shall I tell you, darling? I hardly know anything. Keep a photo of the Master with you and know for certain that he .is very near you. Pour out your heart's grief by shedding tears before him. Cry and pray earnestly: 'Oh Master! Please draw me towards you. Please grant me peace.' By repeatedly doing this you will find peace of mind. Have faith in the Master and turn to him in prayer whenever you feel distraught." The Mother looked towards us and said, "Ah! She has received this shock only today. Is it possible for her to regain her peace of mind in a day?" The girl's father was all the while standing in front of the door. Now he and his daughter saluted the Holy Mother, silently offering her their mental anguish, and calmly returned home.

Then finding everything quiet in the room, I said, "Mother, I have a question to ask. If you kindly permit, I shall place it before you." Finding me hesitant, that same middle-aged lady (later I knew her to be the Revered Golap-Ma) said, "Tell her, darling. You can tell the Mother frankly your innermost thoughts. Why should you be shy before her?"

Then I said, "Mother, I only wanted to say that I saw you and the Master in a dream. You seemed to be giving me spiritual initiation, but it was not finished. Ever since that dream I have felt a strong urge to take refuge at your holy feet." Mother graciously replied, "Well, I shall give you spiritual initiation today itself. But do you have the consent of your husband?"

Disciple: I asked my husband concerning it. He said, "I have no objection, but I am not going to take initiation now. You can have it."

Mother: Where does your husband live?

Disciple: In Raipur.

Mother showed me the bathroom and said, "Go and wash your hands and feet."

Disciple: Mother, I have not taken my bath yet.

Mother: That's all right. You need not take a bath.

After washing my hands and feet in the bathroom, I went to the shrine-room and found that the Mother had already spread two asanas there. Two canoe-shaped copper vessels containing Ganges water had been arranged for worship. The Mother was sitting on one asana facing the picture of the Master. She asked me to take my seat on the asana placed on her left. Taking water from the bigger canoe-shaped vessel, she performed the ritual called Achamana and made me also do the same. Next she asked me, "Which Deity are you devoted to?" On hearing my reply, she gave me spiritual initiation and then showed me the procedure for repeating the Mantra. That very moment a current of bliss swept over me. A gush of joy welled up within my heart and overwhelmed me. I was aware of practically nothing, but the Mother guided me in completing the initiation. When it was over, the Mother said, "Now give me the offering due to the Guru."

Disciple: Mother, I don't know anything. Please tell me what to do. I have not brought any money.

Mother got up and brought two handfuls of flowers, oranges, plums, etc. and handed them to me. Then she told me to pray: "I am offering to you whatever good or bad deeds I have done in my past or present life, knowingly, or unknowingly." I repeated this, and the Mother graciously accepted them all. Mother! Oh, the compassion you have shown me, a good-for-nothing, unworthy person—a compassion that seeks no return! My whole being was consumed by it. Ah, what an experience! What things I saw! What words I heard! I surrendered myself, my being, my whole being, to the lotus feet of the Mother and became blessed.

After saluting the Mother I came out on to the verandah and stood like one possessed, holding the railing for about an hour. I was brought back to normalcy by the cry of a girl and subsequently by the voice of the Mother, and then I went back into the room. When the Mother saw me, she said, "Take your seat, dear, take your seat." When I had sat down, she said, "She is my niece, Radharani. Ever since her mother lost her mental balance, I have been taking care of the girl." The Mother was holding her, but she was vigorously trying to free herself and flee. In various ways the Mother tried to persuade her to be quiet. The Mother braided her hair, dressed her, fed her with her own hand, and said so many affectionate words to her! I was surprised to see this sort of typical worldly behaviour on the part of the Holy Mother. About this time, I was called for taking a bath in the Ganges and so I got up and left. On my return I found the Mother offering food to the

Master. Coming out of the shrine, the Mother entered the room where the food offering was made to the Master. Then she shut the door of the room and came back to where we were. After that the Swamis took their noon meal. Golap-Ma served them. When the meal was over, the Swamis left the room.

The plate containing the food which had been offered to the Master was brought into the middle room. Asanas were placed for the womenfolk and for Panchu, the five year old boy who had accompanied me, to sit on. The Holy Mother and all of us took our meal together. I had a desire to take food consecrated by the Holy Mother and so I was quietly waiting. Everyone except me began to eat. Twice or thrice the Mother requested me to eat, saying, "Please take your food," Then Golap-Ma came up to me and enquired, "What's the matter with you?" I said, "Kindly give me a little food consecrated by Holy Mother." The Mother mixed her rice, ate a little of it, and placed a portion on my plate. Ah! What can I say? What a nectar I partook on that day! The cook had prepared arahar (the pigeon-pea) pulse, curried cauliflower, and a dish of chalta (Dillenia speciosa). Golap-Ma had prepared curried fish. All the preparations were very tasty. "I must have more of this curry. I must!" cried Panchu, and began to make a fuss. My whispered rebukes had no effect on him. At that moment Golap-Ma again appeared and asked, "What has happened? Why is this boy behaving like this?"

I said, "I did not want him to accompany me, Mother. I was trying to come here unobtrusively. But when the carriage had gone some distance, Panchu, who was playing on the street, came running and jumped in. And now he is making a fuss, saying, 'I shall take more of the cauliflower curry.' "When they heard this, Golap-Ma, and the others began to laugh. Golap-Ma said, "You wanted to avoid him, but how could you hope to succeed? It was on account of his good past-deeds that he was able to meet the Holy Mother. What a great good fortune it is! It will do him good." The Mother supported the viewpoint of Golap-Ma by saying, "Yes, that's right."

After the noon meal I waited upon the Holy Mother during the entire day. I was supposed to leave for Raipur, as Parul and Kamala had insisted that I should go. But it was a far-off place, and so lest I should miss seeing the Holy Mother in the near future, I didn't go.

The Mother sat in the sun on the roof to dry her wet hair and began talking about her parental home. She said, "I brought up Radhu, who is a mentally imbalanced girl. She wouldn't take food unless she is fed by others. Besides, I am not keeping good health; I suffer from rheumatism. For treatment I went to Varanasi and Vrindaban, but it was of no avail"

After we had talked about various matters the Mother said, "You are so young, a mere child. How is it that you felt an inclination for spiritual initiation?"

Disciple: Mother, I really don't know. I don't enjoy worldly life. In my heart I really want to shun worldly life. In fact, I was feeling great restlessness. At long last I have found peace of mind today. Besides, this world is something impermanent. It is really only for a few days. Everything around me seems unreal. So how can I give my mind to it?

About this time a lady of the same age as the Holy Mother came in and sat down. As I was sitting very close to the Mother, the latter's shadow fell on my person. Noticing this, the lady rebuked me, saying, "What sort of a girl are you that you are sitting on the shadow of the Holy Mother? You will incur sin. Please sit a little away." I sat very close to the Mother, for I had taken her to be my very own. Now, feeling embarrassed, I moved away a little. The lady then asked the Mother, "Who is this girl?"

Mother: The girl has received initiation today. She is very devoted.

At these words of the Mother I felt embarrassed, and so I went to the next room where Parul and the others were gossiping. Just then Lalit came and said, "Come on, Sister. The carriage is ready. It is nearing sunset." So I went to the Holy Mother to take leave of her. The Mother said: "When will you come here next, dear?"

Disciple: I shall come to you whenever you graciously remember me. I am not able to do so by my own effort. Mother, kindly bless me. Kindly remember me, O Mother.

Mother: Please come again, dear.

I looked at her with a sorrowful heart. She gave me two betel-leaf rolls. I prostrated myself at her feet and returned with my physical body, leaving

behind with the Mother my real self. With tears in her eyes the Mother stood on the top of the staircase. I was full of joy within and without. I was hearing the voice of the Mother, as it were, even when I was travelling in the carriage.

The Mother kept her word; for, two years later, on my return from Raipur, I was able to see her again during her last illness.

08: Recorded by Smt. Sailabala Chowdhury

On the morning of Sunday, 2nd Shravan 1311 B.S. (July, 1904) the Revered Gauri-Ma, her Durga, and I were travelling in a hackney-carriage to the most respected Holy Mother's rented house at Baghbazar. This was the first time I was going to pay my homage at her holy feet. On the way I expressed to Gauri-Ma with much feeling and many tears my hope that the visit might bring good to me. Arriving at the Holy Mother's house, Gauri-Ma went ahead of us to the first floor and we followed. Going upstairs, I noticed that Gauri-Ma was conversing with the Mother in a low voice. I don't know what passed between them but I heard the Holy Mother saying to her, "You brought Suren's wife here the other day, and now you have brought this daughter today—this seems to be your regular work." On hearing this, Gauri-Ma said, assertively, "Oh, you will certainly give her initiation, won't you? What else is the purpose of your existence?"

At this, the Mother quietly said, "Then come, darling, the time is auspicious now." The Mother ushered Durga into the shrine and shut the door. Gauri-Ma and I waited on the verandah.

The initiation was soon over, and Durga came out of the room. Then I went into the shrine room and the door was closed. The Mother was already inside. Gauri-Ma and Durga stood outside on the verandah. The Mother made me sit on the asana meant for the worshipper and then had me worship the Master. Before she gave me initiation, the Mother asked, "Does your family have a Guru?" I said, "Yes."

Mother: Do you intend to take initiation from him also?

Disciple: No.

From inside the room the Mother asked Gauri-Ma, "Gaurdasi, the Mantra of which deity shall I give her?" Then according to Gauri-Ma's suggestion, the Mother gave me initiation: I was accustomed to doing Japa. But when the Mother asked me to do Japa, my body and mind were in such a condition then that I was unable to comply. While making me repeat the Holy Name, the Mother herself held my hand and kept count on my fingers. Then the door of the shrine was opened. Gauri-Ma entered and told me to offer flowers at the Mother's feet. I obeyed.

When we had arrived at her house, the Mother was getting ready to go to the Ganges for her bath. But now our visit had prevented her from going. We took our noon meal and spent the whole day there.

That day the Mother was searching for a misplaced key. Noticing a key lying close to the cot, I told her, "Here is a key." I didn't know that the Mother was looking for that very key. I did not dare touch it. The Mother picked it up with-great joy and blessed me.

I didn't feel like leaving the Mother. When I was saluting her at the time of taking leave, she said, "Come again, dear. Write to me now and then."

On the Janmashtami day of Bhadra (August-September), my third sister and I had gone to Kankurgachhi Yogodyan to attend the festival there. We noticed that special arrangements were being made there for the reception of the Holy Mother. A place close to the temple had been enclosed for her to take rest in. I was feeling great joy to think that the Mother would come here and I would see her. Truly, the Mother's arrival created great excitement. The Mother along with Lakshmi-Didi walked along the long pathway on which a new cloth had been stretched. The conch was blown to mark the auspicious visit. Many among those assembled became anxious to see the Holy Mother. We also proceeded to meet her when we noticed her approaching solemnly, with her face partly veiled with her cloth. Seeing me, she said, "So you have come, my child!" As there had gathered a big crowd around her, I could not say anything in reply, and so I simply nodded. My Sej-Didi was much grieved at the demise of her son. She said to me, "I have never met the Holy Mother. Please ask her to bless me." But in the midst of the large crowd, I was not getting an opportunity to speak. As soon as I found her a little free, I said, "Mother, this is the wife of my husband's brother." No sooner had I spoken than the Mother said affectionately, "I know everything, my child." I couldn't tell her anything else.

One day my Sej-Didi and I went to see the Holy Mother. After saluting her we went to the shrine room to pay our homage to the Master. On our return the Mother said, "Take your seat." And so we sat down. After chatting for some time, in the course of conversation, I told the Mother, "Mother, you are Mahamaya; you have nicely deluded us by bestowing parents, husbands, and children on us." The Mother immediately replied, "Don't speak like this- that

I have kept others deluded! The sufferings of people bound in the world pain me very much. But what can I do, my child? They don't seek liberation."

Another day, along with my Sej-Didi I went to see the Mother. After some talk, the Sej-Didi asked her, "Mother, where is God?" The Mother replied, "Dear, where else is God except very close to His devotees? If worldly people even visit the place used by holy men, the very atmosphere of the place can remove the dross of their mind."

One day Sej-Didi, Na-Didi, Mani, and I had gone to see the Mother. When Sej-Didi requested the Mother to give Na-Didi and Mani initiation, she kept quiet. After a while Sej-Didi raised the topic of initiation again. Mother said somewhat gravely, "They have their family Guru. It will be best to take initiation from him." A little later Sej-Didi left the room. I remained seated. Then Mother said, "Is the giving of initiation a trifling matter? One has to assume the entire responsibility for the disciple's sins."

I asked the Mother one day, "You have instructed me how to perform Japa of the name of the Master; but how shall do Japa of your name?" The Mother replied, "You can do it with the name 'Radha' or any other name that suits you. If you cannot choose any such name, then repeat simply 'Ma'."

One day after our noon meal Sej-Didi and I went to see the Holy Mother. On arriving we found the doors of her room closed and learned that she was taking rest. After some time the door was opened and we went in and saluted the Mother and sat down. The Mother asked, "When did you arrive, my children?" We replied, "We came a while ago. As you were taking rest, we waited outside your room." After some talk I said, "Mother, people are blessed with various visions, but I have not had any." The Mother said, "These experiences belong to a lower realm." These words raised high hopes in me. It struck me that I would have something higher than these visions. Then I said, "Mother, shall I not attain anything?" She replied, "Of course you will, my child."

One day I asked the Mother about worshipping the Master. She replied, "You are involved in worldly life. You would not be able to manage the formalities of worship."

Whenever the Holy Mother was asked to give some instructions, she would say, "Call upon the Master. He will do everything for you. Uncle Moon is the uncle of all"

One day my mother and I were on our way to visit the Holy Mother. As we were proceeding we came across Sudhira-Didi who was returning after visiting the Holy Mother. When we raised the topic of Sudhira-Didi before the Mother, the latter remarked, "What a fine girl she is! She isn't married. How she stands on her own and moves about in a carriage alone!"

Another day my mother and I went to the Mother's house. After saluting her I said, "We have been trying to come here for a long while but were delayed on account of the carriage," The Mother said, "You come here to see the Deity. Why should you waste money by engaging a carriage? Come on foot."

One noon my mother and I had gone to see the Holy Mother. Golap-Ma became annoyed at our visit at such an inconvenient hour and said, "It is not really visiting Mother, it is only vexing her. Now the cooking is over. If you had intended to come at such an odd time, you should have informed us in the morning. Now, how can the others take their food without sharing it with you?" Golap-Ma said to the Holy Mother, "You are a fine person indeed! You entertain anybody who approaches you and calls you 'Mother.' "The Mother said in reply, "What can I do, Golap? If someone comes here and calls me 'Mother', I can't neglect him."

Whenever I used to go along with my mother to see the Holy Mother, we would be late in reaching there; for my mother could go only after attending to her household duties. On the way to the Mother's house, I would be afraid lest we should come across Golap-Ma, who was likely to scold us for coming late. One day the Holy Mother told her, "What else can they do? They can come only after attending to all their duties." When we were about to take leave of the Holy Mother after saluting her, she said, "Why do you go without taking your meal?" We replied, 'Our meal is ready at home. We shall leave now." The Mother wanted very much to have us for lunch. At last she remarked, "All right, my children, come again; Golap gets annoyed." The Mother gave us a little quantity of consecrated food in a cocoanut shell which we carried home.

One day my mother and I took flowers, Bilva leaves and basil leaves to the Mother's house with a view to offering them at her feet. At the very sight of us Golap-Ma was vexed, and so we stood quiet. After a while I told the Mother, "Mother, we have brought these flowers to offer at your feet." The Mother said, "Yes, you may offer them." I said, "Mother, where shall I get a little water?" The Mother said, "It is there. Take it." I sprinkled a little water on her feet and was about to offer the flowers and other articles, when she said, "Don't offer the basil or Bilva leaves. Offer the flowers only." After offering the flowers at her feet, I saluted her and asked, "What shall I do with these flowers?" The Mother replied, "Take them home."

I sent to the Holy Mother through a devotee a rosary which I had previously used when repeating the name of Lord Hari and also a new rosary of Rudraksha beads. The Mother performed Japa using the new rosary, but as regards the old one she objected, saying, "This is an old rosary." Nevertheless, as a devotee requested her, she performed Japa using that rosary also. When I saw the Mother next, I asked her, "What Mantra shall I use with the Rudraksha beads?" The Mother repeated it to me. When I asked her, "Should I utter this Mantra also while using the rosary meant for repeating the name of Lord Hari?", she replied, "That rosary is only for remembering Lord Hari." It usually takes much time to count the beads of a rosary meant for repeating the name of Lord Hari but it would take a shorter time to count with the Rudraksha beads. And so I again asked the Mother what I should do with the old rosary. The Mother guessed my intention and said, "All right, use the string of Rudraksha beads. Then you can do the Japa quickly."

One night in a dream Sej-Didi had received instructions to present the Mother with a red-bordered Sari. So she purchased one and went to the Mother's house along with me. After saluting the Mother, Sej-Didi told her about her dream, and placed the Sari at her feet. The Mother smilingly took the Sari in her hand and wrapped it round herself. After a short while she removed it and said, "How can I wear it, my child? People would say, 'The wife of the Paramahamsa (Sri Ramakrishna) is using a red-bordered Sari.' But since you have brought it I shall use it for taking my bath." Learning that the Mother would soon leave for Orissa, we came away that day.

When the Mother returned to Calcutta, Sej-Didi and I went to Baghbazar to see her holy person. The Mother talked much about Puri. Thereafter Sej-Didi

enquired if the Mother had used the Sari. The Mother replied, "Yes, my child, I used it. But after a few days of use, I gave it to someone."

On another occasion, Sej-Didi and I went to see the Holy Mother. After conversing on various topics, we asked her, "What will happen to us?" The Mother replied, "Call on the Master." Sej-Didi said, "But we haven't seen the Master; we know only you." Then the Mother said, "Do you want me to drown myself like the Guru of the story? Once a disciple, uttering 'Jai Guru' with great faith, crossed a river. Observing this, the Guru mused, 'So my name has so much power!' Then uttering 'I, I', the Guru went into the water- and was drowned!"

09: Recorded by an Anonymous Devotee

The Holy Mother was living in Kothar, Orissa. My second brother, who was staying at Sashi Niketan in Puri, wrote to one of his friends in our native village, "The Holy Mother is now living in Kothar. You can go there to pay your respects." Till that time I had only a vague idea regarding the Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna. I had not read any book on them, nor did I know anything in particular about them. None the less I had felt a yearning to see her ever since I had heard about her. After being continuously seized for a few days by such an urge, I left for Kothar. It was almost past midday when I reached the place. But strange to say, my yearning had by now waned, and it was not so strong. The devotees were invited for their midday meal, and I accompanied them. The meal over, we seated ourselves in the parlour along with Revered Krishnalal Maharaj and Kedar Baba (Swami Achalananda), when Ram Babu, the only son of the late Balaram Bose, came and told Krishnalal Maharaj, "The Mother has sent for the boy who has come from Cuttack. He should go to salute her now." Krishnalal Maharaj replied, "I have asked him to see the Holy Mother in the afternoon." Ram Babu said, "No, that won't do; the Mother is waiting for him. Only after the boy meets her will she go for her meal." I accompanied Ram Babu and bowed down to the Mother. I had no talk with her then. The next day I came back home.

On my return home, I experienced a similar yearning once again, and so I went to Kothar. After a few days' stay there I went to the Holy Mother one morning and said, "Mother, I shall leave for home tomorrow morning." The Mother replied, "Well, stay here tomorrow and leave for home the next day." I came out of the room. After a while a monk came to tell me, "The Holy Mother is going to favour you. Keep yourself ready for it after your bath tomorrow morning." I wondered what the favour might be. I could make nothing of it and kept silent. Early next morning I made myself ready after my morning bath, when Radhu-Didi announced, "Who is Vaikuntha Babu? The Mother has sent for him." I said, "My name is Vaikuntha. Am I to go to the Mother?" She nodded and I followed her to meet the Holy Mother. On seeing me, the Mother said, "Come, come inside the room." She asked, "Will you take Mantra?" I replied, "If you are pleased, kindly give me. I know nothing about it." The Mother said, "Well, be seated here." Then she asked, "The Mantra of which deity would you like to have?" I replied, "I know

nothing about these things." Thereupon the Mother said, “Well this Mantra will suit you."

The Mother initiated me with the Mantra that very day. It was the seventh lunar day of Magh of 1317 (January-February 1911). One day while on a visit I asked her, "Mother, can I have another spiritual guide for my lessons on Yoga?" In reply she said, "You may have guides for learning various other things, but should have no other person for spiritual guidance."

Ram Babu woke me up at about midnight prior to the morning I was to leave Kothar. He handed over a packet of sweets to me and said, "Vaikuntha, the Mother presents you with these sweets. Carry them with you. The Mother advised you not to take food from any wayside shop."

* * *

Another time I went alone to see the Holy Mother. She had then come from Jayrambati to Kamarpukur for a few days. This was my first visit to Kamarpukur. The revered Ramlal-Dada and Lakshmi-Didi were staying there too. On the first day Ramlal-Dada and I were seated on the verandah for dinner. The Mother herself was serving us food. While serving, she told me several times, "Vaikuntha, take everything, don't leave anything on the leaf." Every time she served, she gave me more and more food. Ramlal-Dada too pressed, me saying, "Eat more; don't be shy." By that time I had already eaten so much that I was unable to take anything more. But I hesitated to say so. Now on hearing Ramlal-Dada's words, the Mother intervened saying, "Look here, he is a whimsical boy. He has taken enough. Please do not insist on his taking more." She said to me, "Vaikuntha, remove the leaf-plate and glass from here. One should not leave them behind in his Master’s house."

On the second day, as I went to salute her, she asked, "When will you be returning home?" I replied, "Mother, I have not seen Belur Math yet. I want to visit the Belur Math and then go home from there." The Mother said, "You need not go to the Math now. You leave for home today." I said, "Mother, I, have come here from so distant a place. I do not intend to go back home without visiting the Belur Math."

The Mother, now firmly, said, "No, you go home. You must, not disobey your Guru." After this I made no further protests. But I thought that I would

contrive to visit the Math after leaving this place, thinking that the Mother would not come to know of it. About this time, two devotees, a man and a woman, had come from Allahabad. The Mother gave them spiritual initiation that very day. The Mother sent for me and said, "You please go along with them." However, I was told that my accompanying them would cause them inconvenience, and so I dropped the idea. The Mother had come to the main entrance to see them off. A little earlier I had put my money bag in a niche in the parlour. Noticing it, the Mother had kept it in the living room. Subsequently she enquired of me through Lakshmi-Didi, "Where has Vaikuntha kept his money bag?" I looked for the bag in the parlour but could not find it. Lakshmi-Didi reported everything to the Mother. The Mother called me and said, "How can you afford to be so careless? He who does not have even this much alertness, how will he look after his house-hold? Your money bag is with me. Well, why did you not go with that party?" When I explained, she was evidently displeased with them. I assured the Mother, saying, "Why are you so anxious on that account? T shall fix up a person to accompany me and leave tomorrow." On hearing this, the Mother moved towards her room.

That afternoon she called me into the inner courtyard. She said, "Read out these letters; let me hear what news they are bringing." I read them out. I still remember the contents of one of them. The letter was from Baghbazar, Calcutta. It said that the ailing Sashi Maharaj wanted to see the Holy Mother once and that he promised to follow the course of treatment that the Mother might suggest for him. On hearing the contents of the letter, the Mother remarked, "What more can I say about medical treatment? Sarat, Rakhal, and Baburam are there. Let them consult among themselves and take the best available decision. If I decide to go to that house, the patient will have to be removed from there. Will that be good for him? Should such an acutely suffering patient be shifted? No, I shall not go. If something adverse happens to Sashi, shall I be able to stay there? You please write him a letter explaining why I do not intend to go now."

The next day after the noon meal I went inside the house to take leave of the Holy Mother. I found her sitting on the verandah and preparing betel leaves. She asked me, "Have you made salutations at the temple of Raghuvir?" I said, "No, Mother."

Mother: Whoever visits this holy place should make some contribution there. Offer some money when you make obeisance to Raghuvir. If you do not have money; take some from me.

Disciple: No, Mother, I have money.

I went to the temple of Raghuvir to make my obeisance. On my return as I saluted the Holy Mother, she suddenly exclaimed, "Vaikuntha, take my name." But the very next moment, she added, "Call on the Master. Calling on the Master will alone serve everything." Lakshmi-Didi who was standing nearby intervened, saying, "Mother, what is this? This is quite improper. What will your children do if you confuse them in this way?"

Mother: Well, what have I done?

Lakshmi-Didi: Mother, you said a moment earlier 'Call on me' and now you are saying 'Call on the Master'.

Mother: Everything is achieved when one calls on the Master.

Lakshmi-Didi came forward and said, "Mother, it is not proper for you to bewilder your children." Then she emphatically added, "Look, Vaikuntha, today for the first time I have heard the Mother saying, 'Call on me.' You must not miss this point. Who else is the Mother? You call on the Mother alone. Very fortunate are you to be given the advice by the Mother herself. You call on none but the Mother." Turning towards the Mother, she said, "Well, Mother, this is explained. I believe." The Mother, through her silence, lent her support indirectly to the words of Lakshmi-Didi.

When I was taking leave of her, the Mother said once again, "Go straight home from here. It would not be wise for you to go to the Math or elsewhere now. Go home and look after your parents. Now you should serve your father." Then she gave me four betel leaves and bade me farewell. I gave up my previous plan, following the Mother's instruction, and returned home via Koalpara. When I had left home for Jayrambati, I had seen my father hale and hearty. Now on coming back home I found him seriously ill; and, in fact, my father passed away six or seven days after my arrival.

On a later occasion, while going to Kamarpukur, I brought with me a letter addressed to the Mother, from one of my fellow disciples. When I was about

to hand over the letter to the Mother, she asked me to read it out. It contained these two questions: (1) "I am going to take up such and such an employment. Will I get entangled in Maya if I join there?" On hearing this, the Mother remarked, "Why should he get entangled in Maya if he simply takes service?" (2) To the question as to whether marriage will bring him good, the Mother did not give any definite reply. On the other hand, the Mother asked me, "My son, are you married?"

Disciple: No, Mother, I have not married.

Mother: Very well, do not marry. Marriage invites many complications.

Once during my stay at Kamarpukur I asked the Mother: "What is the harm in taking fish and meat?"

The Mother replied, "This is the land of fish; you can take fish."

It was during one of these days that I once requested her to give me a print of her feet. The Mother replied, "This cannot be done here now. Everybody here does not look upon me in the way you do. Some members of Laha Babu's family frequently visit this place. If I give you my footprint, the red paint will linger on my feet and I shall have to hide myself from them."

Another time I had gone to Jayrambati in the company of a few fellow disciples from my native district. On arriving there it occurred to me several times, "I have come from such a distant place. I have not achieved anything worth mentioning till now. I would consider myself blessed if I could serve the Holy Mother."

One day my fellow disciples went to Kamarpukur while I stayed back. In the afternoon I went to see the Mother. She was sitting on the porch of the new house in front of the kitchen store. When the Mother saw me, she said, "My child, bring the pitcher of wheat flour from the store." I did as directed. She took out some quantity of flour, mixed it with water, and asked me to knead the dough. I finished the work and shortly after came back to the parlour. I went to her again in the evening when she was resting on the portico in front of her living room. There I sat quietly for sometime. After a while the Mother said, "Vaikuntha, my son, please stroke my legs a little." While I was doing so, the Mother said, "Why have my sons not returned from Kamarpukur yet? Have they taken the wrong road?" Saying this, she became

quite anxious and sent for Brahmachari Jnan. When Jnan came, she said, "Jnan, see why they are so late in returning from Kamarpukur." Brahmachari Jnan walked quite some distance to trace their whereabouts and finally met them. They had indeed taken a wrong path! Had Brahmachari Jnan not gone to look for them, they would have taken much longer to reach Jayrambati.

At night we slept on the portico of the Mother's main house. In the early hours, at about 4 o'clock, we woke up. One of us said, "Ah, if only we could see Mother at this auspicious juncture of night and day!" and then began singing, "O gracious Mother, get up and open the door," etc. As soon as the song was over, we were surprised to see the Mother opening the door and standing in front of it. At this sudden and unexpected appearance of the Mother we were extremely happy. All of us saluted her in turn. Then she quietly went inside and locked the door.

On another occasion, during the worship of Vasanti, a few of us went to Jayrambati. Finding white lotuses in a pond on our way, we collected some of them. As we were preparing ourselves to offer those white lotuses at the feet of the Holy Mother, she sent word, saying, "White flowers cannot be used for the worship of the Goddess." On hearing this we procured some red lotuses and joyously offered them at her feet.

One day I heard her say to someone in the course of a conversation, "Don't tease me much, for if I admonish you, losing my temper, no one can give you protection."

On that occasion I asked her, "Mother, the Government is putting young men behind bars these days. What do you think will be its outcome?" "Yes, this is very improper," the Mother, replied. "However, a solution will soon be found. You will not have to wait for long. Certainly it will bring good ultimately."

One day I told her, "Mother, kindly do something for me." To this she replied, "There are Sarat, Rakhal, and others. Why do you worry?" Then I said, "Mother, I greatly desire to live in the Math for some days." But Mother did not give her consent. She said, "You need not go to the Math now. Live in your own home. "

This time the Holy Mother kindly initiated Kshirode Mukhopadhyaya of our native village. I learnt from Kshirode Babu that the Mother said at the time

of his spiritual initiation: "All your sins committed in this life as well as in earlier ones are gone."

One day I made obeisance to the Holy Mother at her residence in. Baghbazar, Calcutta. I was standing by her side, when she asked, "Have you saluted Master Mahasaya?' "No, Mother, I said, "I do not know him."

She then advised me: "Go downstairs. You will find him there. He is a noble soul. Please go and salute him." She deputed Golap- Ma to escort me and introduce me to Master Mahasaya. I went below, bowed to him, and came back upstairs. Just then two persons were going downstairs after saluting the Holy Mother, who was sitting on her cot in the shrine room. I heard her whisper, "The indiscriminate touch of people has caused me stinging pain!"

Once I had a quarrel with my brother regarding some worldly matters. I wanted to inform the Holy Mother of my intention of staying somewhere other than my own house, and I also wanted her permission to do so. After my salutation I was standing nearby. Addressing Golap-Ma, the Mother said, "O Golap, have you heard that Vaikuntha has come here to complain about his brother's slapping him on the cheek? Do not householders sometimes kick up a row? But then why should one go too far?" Now turning to me, she said, "Go home, my son. It is quite common to have occasional hitches in family life."

A fellow disciple of mine, who had forgotten his gayatri Mantra, asked me to teach it to him. I wrote to the Mother in a letter, "Should one disclose a Mantra to someone else?" The Mother was then on a pilgrimage to the South and was staying in Madras. She wrote in reply, "A Mantra should not be disclosed to anyone. You can, however, tell it to a fellow disciple. There is no harm in that."

One day, being depressed, I went to see the Holy Mother at the Udbodhan house in Baghbazar. I bowed to her and said, "Mother, I am here to tell you something."

Mother: What's that? Come on, tell me.

Disciple: When will you bestow your grace on this unfortunate child of yours?

Mother: Child, remember the Master. He will certainly bless you. Keep only holy company and do your spiritual practices. Everything will be achieved if the Master is remembered.

Disciple: I have tried, Mother, but nothing has happened. I have not seen the Master, how can I remember him? I have received your blessings. Now that you are saying thus, you yourself kindly tell the Master about this unfortunate child of yours.

Mother: How can you achieve the goal without practising Japa and meditation? One must practise these disciplines.

Disciple: I don't feel like doing japa, etc. any more; for nothing whatsoever is of any avail. Desire, anger, delusion—these still hold sway over my mind exactly as they did before. The impurities of my mind have not decreased yet.

Mother: Child, the repetition of the name of God will gradually remove impurities. How can you expect results without such disciplines? Don't be foolish and neglect them. Whenever you find time, repeat the holy name of God. And pray to the Master.

Disciple: No, Mother, I do not have that capacity. Whenever I try to repeat the name, I find my mind agitated. Either you make my mind concentrated on God so that no evil thought assails me, or you take back the holy name! I do not want to be a cause of suffering to you; for I have heard that a spiritual preceptor suffers if his disciples do not repeat the sacred name.

Mother: Well, what is this? My worries about you have made me restless. The Master has blessed you already.

These words brought tears to the Mother's eyes. With great feeling she said, "Well, you will not have to repeat the Mantra any more." This implied that she herself would do whatever was necessary on my behalf. But I failed to grasp the import of her words, and fear and apprehension gripped me. Thinking that my connections with the Mother were going to be snapped, I passionately said, "Mother, are you snatching away everything that I possessed? What shall I do now? Well, Mother, am I now doomed to annihilation?"

On hearing these words she said emphatically, "What! You being my child, can you be doomed? Those who have come here, those who are my children, have already achieved liberation. Even God can do no harm to my children!"

Disciple: Well, Mother, what should I do now?

Mother: Take refuge in me and keep quiet. And always remember that there is behind all of you one who in time will lead you to the abode of eternity.'

Disciple: Mother, so long as I am here, I feel happy. No worldly thought disturbs me. But as soon as I return home various bad thoughts haunt me. I again get mixed up with unholy companions and commit evil deeds. However hard I try, I cannot get rid of bad thoughts.

Mother: All this is owing to the impressions gathered in your previous births. Can anyone forcibly get rid of them in a trice? Live in holy company. Try to be pure. And everything will be achieved gradually. Pray to the Master. I am with you. Know that you have already achieved liberation in this very birth. Why do you fear? In time he will do everything for you.

10: Recorded by Srischandra Ghatak

It was the Bengali month of Jaistha (May-June) of 1910. A party of us started from Shillong with the object of paying our respects to the Holy Mother at Jayrambati. All of us had seen the Mother's photo taken in her earlier days. While on the way, one of us saw the Holy Mother in a dream, just as she looked at the time. Later, on seeing her at Jayrambati, the striking resemblance of the dream image to the Mother herself brought us unbounded joy and wonder. One of us had already received spiritual initiation from a certain monk. On being told of this, the Holy Mother remarked, "The Mantra was given by a monk—you will be illumined." Except for him, the rest of us received the great Mantra from the Holy Mother this time. Soon after the initiation, we asked for her permission to visit Kamarpukur. She said, "How is that possible? Today, my children, I should feed you sumptuously."

We have read in the Gita, "What is action and what is inaction? Even the wise are puzzled over this question. Therefore, I shall tell you what action is. When you know that, you will be free from all impurity. You must learn what kind of work is to be done, what kind is to be avoided, and how one could reach a state of calm detachment in work. The real nature of action is hard to understand." So I wondered what else I would have to do for gaining emancipation from the worldly ties, after I had received the Mother's grace. I asked her, "Mother, what else have I to do?" She replied, "You have nothing more to do."

Disciple: Shall I have to do nothing else?

Mother: Nothing, dear.

Disciple: Nothing else, really?

Mother: No, nothing else.

Thus assured by the very same reply three times, I was convinced that she, who had bestowed her grace on me, had also taken upon herself the responsibility of releasing me from the cycle of birth and death.

I had studied the palm of Aunt Bhanu and said to her, "Auntie, you will live for another twenty-five years." Aunt Bhanu went to the Mother and said,

"Mother, your son knows palmistry." The Mother immediately called me. When I went to her, she said, "Dear, can you read the lines on my palm? Please tell me if I shall be cured of the gout in my legs?" I was struck dumb by her question, for I knew nothing of palmistry. I had simply made an intelligent guess in Aunt Bhanu's case. I had heard that the Holy Mother's acceptance of the sins of her disciples was responsible for the pain in her legs. I therefore said, "Since we are responsible for this suffering, can you really be free from this as long as we are with you?"

On hearing this, the Mother was deeply pained. Sinking to the floor, she murmured, "O Mother, what does he say?"

Seeing her so perplexed, I said,' "Well, Mother, do you really want to be free from this suffering?"

Mother: Yes, of course.

Disciple: Then you will be cured.

Now, this made her glad. A little later the Mother remarked, "Do you see what kind of devotion he has! He feels that everything depends on my will."

I went to bid the Mother farewell on the day I was to leave for home. I told her, "Mother, I cannot correctly keep count while I tell my beads. When my fingers move, my lips do not; and when my fingers and lips move, my mind fails to get fixed." Mother replied, "In future see that your tongue and fingers (sic. lips) do not move. Perform Japa mentally."

While taking leave, I saluted her and said, "Mother, I am going now." Immediately the Mother interjected saying, "Dear, please say 'I am coming'; you should not say 'I am going.'" I corrected myself, and the Mother glanced at me with satisfaction.

Following the Durga Puja of 1912, the Holy Mother stayed for some time at Banaras. We too went to Banaras at the time of the Mother's birthday in the month of December. On her birthday we saluted her at Lakshminivas in the morning. We worshipped her with garlands of flowers. The Mother gave each of us a garland, which had been offered to her by devotees. I partook also of sweets offered to the Holy Mother, and then went to the Advaita Ashrama where Homa was being performed after the worship. All those

present were offering oblations. We too moved forward to offer our oblations, when some of those present protested, saying, "You have already taken food. Don't offer any oblation." As a result, everyone except me offered oblations. Just before this the Holy Mother had come to the Advaita Ashrama, and had noticed all that took place. Addressing the women devotees, the Mother said, "What they have received is my Prasada only. When did they take their food? They should offer oblations, of course." All this I heard from the women devotees later.

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On the eighth day of the fortnight in the month of Magha (January, 1913), I brought my wife and widowed sister to the Holy Mother in expectation of her benign grace. The Mother was kind enough to grant both of them spiritual initiation. My wife said to the Holy Mother, "Mother, I feel like performing Siva Puja." The Mother replied, "You are too young; you will not be able to do it correctly. Later, at the proper time, you will learn how to worship Siva. Now you should rather devote time to the service of your elders at home." The Mother praised my sister, saying, "Her mind is quite pure." We had taken with us some mangoes. Mangoes were quite costly in those days. When the Mother saw the heap of mangoes, she observed, "Why have you purchased mangoes at such a high price? Besides, these mangoes are not ready for eating yet—they taste sour."

* * *

During the Janmashtami holidays of 1913, a number of us, fellow disciples, went to Jayrambati. It was already dusk when we reached the Math at Koalpara. As our holiday was short, we did not halt at the Math for the night, but proceeded towards Jayrambati. On the way we were caught in a heavy shower of rain. The night too was pitch-dark. The village paths were muddy and inundated at places. We braved all these hardships and finally reached Jayrambati. But as the night was quite advanced, the Holy Mother was not informed of our arrival. The next morning we saluted the Mother and told her of our ordeals. On hearing about them she said, "Oh dear, the Master must have protected you. How many snakes you must have trampled upon while traversing the muddy road in the dark! I am much pained to hear of your toils. It is not good to go about recklessly."

We said, "Mother, we were pining to see you, and the period of our leave is short. That's why we were in a hurry."

Mother: It is natural for you to have such yearning, but it causes me anxiety.

Srimati Sudhira, the former Superintendent of the Nivedita Girls' School, was then staying at Jayrambati. At noon that day the Mother sent for me and said, "Look, Sudhira will travel along with you up to Vishnupur. Please move cautiously. The bullock cart carrying her should be placed in between those of your party. You are all my own, my children."

Disciple: Certainly we shall escort her. And we shall strictly follow your instruction.

While we were taking our night meal, the Mother sat nearby and began to chat. Someone raised the topic of initiation of a boy who was about seven years old. The Mother said, "How can he have initiation? He is still quite young. He has perhaps not even learned how to bathe or wash himself! The boy is a devotee; let him live long. Let him be a servant of the Lord's devotees. "

As the conversation proceeded, I asked her, "Mother, we take food from anybody and everybody-will this be spiritually harmful to us?"

Mother: The Master emphatically objected to one's partaking of food of the sraddha ceremony; for it affects the devotion of the person. Although in all such ceremonies Narayana, the Lord of Yajna is worshipped, he prohibited the taking of the food offered at a sraddha ceremony.

Disciple: Then what should we do in the case of sraddha ceremonies of our near relations?

Mother: Well, how can you avoid it in the case of your near relations? You can't.

The next day I went to see her at about 2 p.m. The Mother was seated on the floor in an absent-minded mood. A few days earlier a devastating flood from the Damodar River had caused havoc. I told her all that I had learnt from newspapers and hearsay. She listened patiently and then said in a voice full of pathos, "My son, do good to the world." Hearing these words from her

lips, I mentally prayed to her to grant me the opportunity of serving the Lord manifested as the universe. As I saluted her before coming out of the house, I heard her murmur, "Only money !money! money!" Hearing these words, I got alarmed. I presumed that Mother was perhaps commenting on my excessive attachment to money. Immediately she looked at me and observed, "No, child, money too is a necessity. Look here, Kali runs after money only."

On 24th December, 1915, I went with my family to see the Mother at the Udbodhan house. My wife was carrying in her hand some sweets. Revered Golap-Ma was putting them aside with the idea of offering them to the Master some other day, when the Mother objected, saying, "Well, don't do that. Please offer now to the Master whatever my daughter-in-law has brought. This will bring good to her." The next morning my wife went to see the Mother. On returning home in the evening she told me, "Today the Mother showered her grace so abundantly on me that its memory will give me joy forever. At about nine or ten in the morning the Mother had puffed rice and fried peas purchased for three Paise. Placing them on her apron and taking her seat on the floor, she began to leisurely partake of the snack. She now and then offered me a handful, saying, "Dear, take it please." Compared to various delicacies I had previously taken, the joy in eating this puffed rice was something unique. At noon the Holy Mother asked me to massage her feet. She also asked me to air her bedding in the sun. She thereby greatly favoured me by accepting my humble services. Besides, I had the following conversation with her.

Disciple: Mother, can I offer cooked food to the Master? Mother: Yes, you can offer cooked food. The Master was fond of Sukta (a quasi-bitter preparation).

Disciple: Can I offer him preparations of fish?

Mother: Yes, you can. While offering them, you have to utter the prescribed Mantras.

Then the Mother asked, "Does my son (thereby meaning the lady's husband) take fish?"

Disciple: Yes, he does.

Mother: Yes, he should take as much as he likes.

In the course of conversation I remarked, "Mother, poverty is stalking the whole country as an offshoot of the World War. How much the people are suffering! Food and clothings have become very costly!"

Mother: In spite of these sufferings, people do not become sensible.

Disciple: Mother, will this War bring us good?

Mother: When the Lord descends, such thing happens. How many more will come to pass. . . .

When I went to take leave of her in the afternoon, the Mother recalled our trip to Jayrambati on the rainy night of Janmashtami, and rebuked me, saying, "To go about without any thought of possible risks is no good."

Disciple: I shall never do so again.

The Mother apparently understood me as saying that I intended not to go to Jayrambati henceforth. So she immediately rejoined. "Certainly you should come here, my son; but even a thorn in your foot affects me as an arrow in the chest!" Glancing at my wife, she said, "Daughter, you keep a watch on him; he should not move about in that way."

* * *

During the Puja vacation of 1917 I went with Jatin, one of my fellow disciples, to the Udbodhan house to pay our respects to the Holy Mother. We had taken two Saris for her. We placed the Saris at her holy feet and bowed down. She blessed us, saying, "Dear, you are not well off; why do you present cloths in this way?" Both of us felt a little hurt and said, "Mother, your well-to-do disciples present you with costly cloths. Now, your not-so-well-off disciples have brought these coarse ones. Kindly accept them and fulfil their hearts' desire."

Gladdened at heart, the Holy Mother now said, "My child, this is silk to me, this is my everything! These mean so much to me!" With these words, she endearingly took the two Saris in her hands. At that time the Mother was

suffering from acute tooth ache. Referring to it she said, "My son, the Master used to say, 'He who never had a tooth ache cannot appreciate its intensity.'"

In the year 1917, I wrote to her a letter praying for her blessings for the successful accomplishment of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebrations at Ranchi. The Mother replied, "It is difficult to express in writing how delighted I was to receive your letter. You are all the children of the Master. In all such noble endeavours he himself will stand by you. Why do you worry on that account?"

In the month of Jaistha, 1919, I asked the Mother at Jayrambati "Mother, does the Master listen to the prayers mentally offered to him? And should we direct our prayers to him instead of telling you?"

In reply the Mother said in an agitated voice, "If the Master truly exists he definitely listens to all prayers."

While bowing down at her feet at the time of leaving Jayrambati, I told her, “Mother, if I do not find a bullock cart in the daytime, I shall walk on foot from Kotulpur to Vishnupur."

Mother: My son, why should you tax your body so much? Why should you exhaust yourself in this way? You will certainly find a cart.

The Mother's prophecy proved true. I got a cart. This was my last meeting with the Mother in a physical sense.

11: Recorded by Swami Ritananda

On that day the Mother was very busy with the Jagaddhatri Puja at her village home in Jayrambati. Now and then she would say, "How will the Mother's worship be performed?" Today she was performing the daily worship of the Master very early. A large quantity of fruits, sweets, etc. was offered. At the time of offering them, she said to the Master, "Look, the Divine Mother's worship will be held today. Please take your food quickly, for I shall have to go to the place of worship." Then she uttered something inaudible. It seemed to me as if she was talking with a living person. When the Puja was over, she went to the place where- Jagaddhatri was being worshipped and sat through the entire Puja, all the time looking intently at the image with adoring eyes.

One day I did the marketing at Koalpara. Then I collected flowers for the Mother to use in worshipping the Master, and went to Jayrambati. When I arrived there the Mother said, "I was thinking you would come just now and I would then go for bathing." She took the articles and then gave me puffed rice to eat. Then wearing a bathing cloth, the Mother began to rub her body with oil, all the while speaking about us, the inmates of the Koalpara monastery. All on a sudden she said, "I am your mother. Why should you feel embarrassed?" Then she finished her bath and went to perform the worship of the Master.

One day I thought I would ask the Mother how I should do my spiritual practices. In the afternoon she was doing Japa with her rosary while sitting on the verandah. But when I approached her, I forgot all that I wanted to ask. I didn't feel like asking her any question. Simply saying, "Mother, kindly take my responsibility," I broke into tears. Then the Mother comforted me saying, "Don't weep. I have already taken up your responsibility long ago. And the Master too has taken up your responsibility long ago. Why do you worry?"

One day I dreamt that the Mother was telling me, "Take the vow of Brahmacharya." When I narrated it to revered Hari Maharaj (Swami Turiyananda), he said, "Go and tell this to the Mother." Some days later I told about this to the Mother at Koalpara. On hearing me, she smiled and said, "All right, come to see me with a new cloth tomorrow when I perform the worship. Let the visit be private." The next day I went to the Mother and

found that she had finished the worship and was sitting on the verandah rubbing her teeth with gul. No sooner had she seen me than she lolled out her tongue and said, "See, the worship is finished; I simply forgot. Nevertheless, I am coming after washing my mouth. Go and be seated in the shrine room." Entering the shrine room, the Mother said, "Shut the door. They (women members of the family) are there." Then she told me, "Take off your shirt." Taking water from the copper Puja vessel, the Mother sprinkled it over my body. Then with her hand she touched my navel, chest, and head, and uttered something mysterious. Taking the new cloth, she said, "Just see, the Master is here. Say: 'I am giving Thee my entire responsibility today.'" Next she gave me the cloth, saying, "Today I have given Sannyasa to your very soul." So elated had I become at that time that I even forgot to salute the Mother. This mood of mine persisted for a few days.

The Mother was living at Koalpara along with Radhu. Radhu, who was almost insane, was expecting a baby. The Mother was all the time worried as to how Radhu would come out safe through this ordeal, and with this end in view she was vowing offerings to various Deities and anxiously praying to them.

During these days the Mother told me once, "Look, it seems that the Hanuman-charit can predict the good or bad future of a person. Well, why don't you find out if it can forecast the fate of Radhu." I procured a copy of the book, and glancing through it, found a chequered table. One has to put his finger on any of the squares. Mother placed her finger on one square, and I read out the results for the same. It said that Radhu has a good future. Very happy at this, the Mother said, "Then Radhu will certainly be all right. Since it is his (Hanuman's) word, she will definitely come round."

At one time the head of the Koalpara monastery had some difference of opinion with his colleagues. The Mother was then staying at Jayrambati. We often purchased provisions for her in Koalpara and carried them to Jayrambati. The Mother used to ask me in detail about the members of the monastery. She was well posted about everything that happened there. One day when her niece asked me about this disagreement, the Mother said to her, "Why are you inquisitive about it?" After she left, the Mother said, "You see, you have to adjust yourself to, all conditions. The Master used to say sha, sha, sha - exercise patience in every thing. The Master is looking after everything."

Later when the Mother was staying at Koalpara, the Head of the monastery told her, "Mother, the monastic workers do not want to stay here. Please tell them that they will not get protection in any other monastery and that everyone of them will have to perform his own work. They want to go elsewhere. If you order them, they won't go anywhere else." No sooner did Mother hear this than she said with some annoyance, "How dare you ask me to speak to them that way? Do you mean to say I should tell them that they won't get shelter anywhere else? They are my children and they have taken shelter in the Master. Wherever they go, the Master will look after them. And you want me to say that they will not find shelter at any other place! I can never utter this." The Mother was then speaking in a loud voice. Everyone became frightened. At once the Head of the monastery fell at her feet and said, weeping, "Mother, please forgive me and protect me." The Mother immediately became quite calm.

One day a devotee from East Bengal came to receive initiation from the Holy Mother, who was staying at Koalpara. When the Mother was informed of this, she said, "No, he won't have initiation." On hearing this the devotee became despondent. The next day without telling anyone, he sat in the sun, outside the house where the Mother was staying, and began weeping. Learning of this situation the Mother said, "Why is he crying in this way? Ask him to go away." I went towards him to convey the Mother's command but seeing his pitiable condition, I could not speak out. In the meantime I noticed that the Mother had partly opened the main door and glanced at the devotee. As I entered the house, the Mother said to me, "Tell him he will have initiation tomorrow." On hearing this, the devotee began to weep even more bitterly. He had his initiation the next day.

One educated devotee, Krishnaprasanna by name, stayed at the Koalpara monastery for some days. One day the Mother told us, "Look, in course of time many devotees will come from abroad. You should learn English from Krishnaprasanna." Accordingly we began to take lessons. But it was discontinued some days later when Krishnaprasanna left.

A certain woman devotee had with her a footprint of the Holy Mother, which was found missing one day. It led to a quarrel among the women. The Mother, who was staying at Koalpara then, laughed at this and said, "Why do you make so much fuss over this? I am here. Take as many footprints as you like!" Afterwards she brought some pieces of cloth and liquid lac-dye and gave a good number of her footprints. This settled the quarrel too!

One day at the residence of uncle Prasanna, the Mother said in the course of a conversation, "Before Radhu was born, 'she used to move about in front of me in the form of a shadow. Pointing to it, the Master said, 'Take her as a support to live.' Do you see how much attached I am to Radhu? How nicely Gourdasi has brought up her adopted daughter, and I have created a monkey!"

At the Koalpara monastery in those days, we used to take parboiled rice. Scarcity of money prevented us from getting enough vegetables. Such poor food resulted in the deterioration of the health of all the members of the monastery. Learning of this, the Mother said, "Why don't you eat fish? What's the good of spoiling your health by not eating fish? I am telling you, there is no harm in it. Take fish." Afterwards the Mother repeatedly told this to the Head of the monastery and persuaded him to introduce fish in the diet of the monastery.

One day at Jayrambati a certain Swami approached the Mother with a paper, a pen and an inkpot, and said, "Mother, we are getting very little milk from our only cow; it is not sufficient to meet our needs. So I am thinking of buying another cow. If you kindly permit, I shall write to some devotees for money" The Mother replied, "Very well, write. You are taking me for an instrument; aren't you? You think that if you write to devotees, money will be forthcoming don't you?"

After he left, the Mother smilingly said, "See, what desire he cherishes! Once when Baburam was suffering from stomach trouble, I gave him sugar-candy syrup to drink. The Master noticed it and said one day, "What did you give Baburam to drink?" I replied, "Sugar-candy syrup." On hearing this he remarked, "They will have to be (all-renouncing) monks. What ill-habits are you helping them to form?"

One day I asked the Mother, "How shall I perform spiritual practices?" She replied, "You will attain everything by calling upon the Master." As I was not satisfied with this, I asked her once again. Annoyed, the Mother said emphatically, "I don't know anything else. You will get whatever you ask him for."

A certain devotee had gone to the Mother for initiation. She asked him, "What is the Mantra of your family?" The devotee replied, "I don't know."

The Mother remained quiet for a while, and then saying, "This is the Mantra of your family," she initiated him. Subsequent enquiry revealed that the Mother was correct.

One day at Koalpara a mentally deranged man began to play the lunatic in front of the Mother's house. Seeing his eccentric behaviour, the Mother remarked, "Just see, it is but a congregation of mad persons! As we have come, all crazy people are assembling here. Look, Radhu is insane, her mother is insane — such persons constitute my family." Saying this, she kept silent for a while. Then she uttered a verse, "The goddess Chandi will come to my home; I shall listen to the holy Chandi; there will assemble many dandi sannyasins, Yogis and holy men with matted hair."

12: Recorded by Smt. Susheela Mazumdar

From Bhowanipur, I went in the company of my husband and son to the Udbodhan House to pay our respects to the Holy Mother. I saw the Mother standing in front of the doorsill of the middle room on the first floor and talking with someone. As I saluted her, she asked, "Where do you come from, my daughter?" She behaved as if we had been acquainted with her for a long time. I replied, "Our home is in Dacca." Before this conversation could end, Golap-Ma summoned the Mother, saying that Ram Babu and Nitai Babu had come to see her. In the meantime, Kapil Maharaj told me, "Please wait a little. Balaram Babu's son and nephew have come. After they have finished talking with the Mother, you can speak to her." Nitai Babu came and stood in front of the Mother. After talking with him, the Mother gave me two Rasagollas and went to the adjoining shrine room to meet Ram Babu.

I remained waiting with two Rasagollas in my hand. After the Mother had spoken with Ram Babu, she called me to the shrine room and asked, "Why have you not eaten them? It is consecrated food. Please take them." At that moment a certain woman devotee entered and remarked, "The Mother fed those present with all the sweets. Now what shall we eat?" Abashed as I was at her remarks-for those two Rasagollas were still in my hand-I said, "You please take these two Rasagollas." She replied, "No, daughter, I didn't mean you; why should I take yours?" Then the Mother said to her, "O! Please don't say such things. It will hurt the devotees. As there are many persons, the Prasada was not sufficient, even though only two sweets were given to each. Ah, they have come from a very remote corner of the country with much difficulty." Then, as the Mother repeatedly requested me, I ate the sweets. The Mother herself brought water for me. Later she said, "The syrup from the sweets has made the floor dirty. Please wipe it with a wet cloth and wash your hands." After I had completed this task, the Mother sat down on the cot and began to enquire about me. Just as I was saying, "I have one son," Ni -- came there to salute the Mother. I said, "Mother, he is my son." Ni - left after making Pranam to the Mother. Then she asked, "Have you not yet arranged for his marriage?"

Disciple: No, he hasn't married.

Mother: He is your only son. Why haven't you got him married?

Disciple: He doesn't want to marry.

Mother: Ah, these days this has become a fashion with young men! Why, can't a married man lead a virtuous life? It is through the mind that one achieves everything. Didn't the Master marry me? Has your son received initiation?

Disciple: Yes, he has been blessed by you.

Mother: Yes! Why should he not marry then? All right, I shall tell him. Perhaps he doesn't want to face hardship. He, who holds on to the Lord, even when afflicted by sufferings, will certainly attain to Him. But tell me, what is your wish?

Disciple: Mother, I don't know what will be good for him. You know what is good and bad for him. Therefore it will be as you say. I don't have any other opinion.

Mother: You see, only those who belong to a high spiritual category can become monks and liberate themselves from all kinds of fetters. Some, again, are born just to enjoy the world. I say, it is good to finish in entirety' enjoyments and sufferings. But it was different in the case of the companions of the Master.

Disciple: Mother, he is but your child. His good and bad depend on you entirely. Do whatever you wish to do.

Mother: I say, let him marry. Let all his enjoyments and sufferings pass off completely. Otherwise, it is difficult to foretell what kind of experience will come to him. Know it for certain, however, that since the Master has caught hold of him, he will never fall. You wait quietly with a placid mind. I have initiated him with a Mantra given by the Master. Can ill fortune ever befall him?

Then she said, "Would you take Prasada here?" As I replied in the affirmative, the Mother went out to tell the store-keeper and returned.

Mother: From whom have you taken initiation? Who told you about the Master?

Disciple: When we went to meet Nag Mahasaya at Deobhog, we heard from him the glories of Sri Ramakrishna. Observing Nag Mahasaya's lofty mental condition, I always felt a strong desire to see Sri Ramakrishna and you. I was not fortunate enough to see Sri Ramakrishna, but through your grace I have seen your holy feet and thereby my desire to see Sri Ramakrishna also has been fulfilled. I have not had initiation directly yet.

Mother: Have you received it in a dream?

Disciple: Yes, Mother. I saw you in a dream and received initiation from you.

Mother: Well, do you remember the Mantra? You had better tell me.

No sooner did I utter the Bija than the Mother said, "Yes, you belong to this category. You are fortunate, indeed!"

Disciple: Mother, will you not tell me anything more?

Mother: No, perform Japa with this Bija. Know for certain that this will bring you good. With whom have you come?

Disciple: I have come with my husband.

Mother: Where does he stay? What does he do?

Disciple: He is the manager of Ram Babu's estate.

Mother: Oh dear! You are the manager's wife? Why didn't you disclose this earlier? O Radhu, O Maku, come and salute the manager's wife.

Quite amazed at the Mother's action, I said, "Mother, what are you saying? I am a Kayastha. They being members of a Brahmana family, how can they salute me?" But the Mother said, "Don't speak like this. You are a devotee. Devotees are casteless. They will reap good if they salute you." As soon as Radhu and Maku came, I caught hold of their feet. Then the Mother said to them, "Stop, stop, she won't allow you. They are devotees, therefore they see the Lord in all beings. Well, what have you heard at Deobhog from Durga

(Nag Mahasaya alias Durgacharan Nag)? How did you happen to visit him and become acquainted with him?"

Disciple: Once my husband went there to see the saint Nag Mahasaya. On that occasion he won the heart of my husband by his unselfish affection and told him repeatedly about Sri Ramakrishna. He very kindly visited our house in order to see me. Being charmed by his attitude and love, we have been visiting him for a long time. And he has graciously made us his own and told us of the greatness of you and Sri Ramakrishna. As a result, we feel drawn towards you and the Master in our heart of hearts. He would only say, "I am nothing; Sri Ramakrishna is my every thing. If you desire good, take refuge in him heart and soul. There is no way out besides this. As luck would have it, I saw the holy feet of the Master and became blessed. I have seen Swamiji—Lord Siva Himself—and I have also seen the Divine Mother incarnate and received Her blessings. What more shall I tell you? With your whole body, mind, and soul take shelter at the holy feet of the Mother and the Master, and it will bring you good."

Mother: Ah, what shall I tell about him? He looked upon me as the Divine Mother Herself. When he came to see me for the first time I was observing the fast enjoined on the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight (Ekadasi). In those days no male devotee was allowed in my presence. Devotees used to salute me by touching the staircase with their heads. One maid servant used to announce the name of the visitor, saying, 'So and so (the person's name) is saluting you, Mother,' and I would send my blessings. On that day the maid said, 'Mother, who is this Nag Mahasaya? He is saluting you, but by striking his head so hard against the staircase that his head is likely to bleed. Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) is standing behind him trying to persuade him to stop, but he doesn't say a word. He seems to be unconscious. Is he a madman, Mother?' I said, 'Oh dear! Tell Yogen to send him here.' Holding him, Yogen himself brought him to me. I saw that his forehead was swollen, tears were rolling down his cheeks and his steps were unsteady. Blinded by tears, he couldn't see me. I made him sit. He was uttering only 'Mother! Mother!' as if insane, but otherwise he was quiet, calm and composed. I wiped away his tears. I had just sat down to eat my meal of luchi, sweets and fruit when he appeared. I partook of a little of the food and then tried to feed him with the Prasada. But he couldn't eat-he couldn't swallow the food; for he had no outward consciousness. He simply sat touching my feet and repeating 'Mother, Mother'. My women companions began to say, 'Mother your meal is spoiled. Let us tell Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) to remove him from

here.' I said, 'Wait. Let him compose himself a little.' As I stroked his head and body and repeated the Master's name for sometime, he regained external consciousness. Then I began to take my meal and also to feed him. When he had finished taking food, he was taken downstairs. Before he left, he only said, 'Not I, but Thou! Not I, but Thou!' I told those who were near about, 'Look, how wise he is.' He would do anything for me. "Once he came wearing a dirty tattered cloth and carrying on his head a basket containing select mangoes from his own trees. He had in mind the desire to feed me while sitting by my side. But he wouldn't express this. He began to walk around with the basket on his head like a destitute. Yogen sent word, 'Tell Mother that Nag Mahasaya has brought mangoes. He doesn't speak a word and won't give the basket to anybody.' I said, 'Send him here.' When he was sent in, he came with the basket on his head. One Brahmacharin took the basket off his head. I had not yet finished my daily worship of the Master. After saluting me, he became unconscious, as on the previous occasion. He was repeating the name of the Master and saying 'Mother, Mother'. Tears were streaming down from His eyes. The mangoes were of a very good quality—some of them had been marked with spots of lime. Some were cut and offered to the Master. Daughter Yogin brought Prasada for me on a plate made of Sal leaves. I ate a little and told Golap, 'Give him a leaf-plate.' When the leaf-plate was brought I placed on it some pieces of mango from my plate and said, 'Please eat.' But who would eat? He had no body consciousness, and his hands were as if paralyzed. I took hold of his hand and tried to persuade him to eat, but he couldn't. Instead, he took a piece of mango and began to rub it on his head. I sent word downstairs and they had him brought down. By repeatedly making Pranam by touching the floor with his head, his forehead had got swollen. He didn't take his meal. I heard that after sometime he regained normal consciousness and left."

After a while leaf-plates were arranged. Mother said, " Come, you will have Prasada." As I followed the Mother into the dining room, she said, "Come; sit facing me in the opposite row."

The Mother mixed her rice with butter, ate three morsels of it and said to me, "Take this Prasada, take it on your palm." When I stretched out my right hand, the Mother said, "Does anyone receive Prasada this way? Spread both your palms to receive it!' I spread both my palms and the Mother placed the entire quantity of rice in them, pressing it with her hand. Then she said, "Touch your head with it and then eat." Being surprised, I said, "Mother, I am a Kayastha; you touched me while taking your meal. How can you take

food now?" The Mother said, "You are all my children; what caste discrimination can there be between you and me? You are but my children. Now take the Prasada." Then shyly I began to eat. Very cheerfully the Mother began to take her meal. She now and then asked what I wanted.

Mother: Well, dear, is there no place of pilgrimage in your part of the country (Dacca, Bangladesh)?

Disciple: No, Mother, I don't know of any holy place worth the name. But people take a holy dip on a certain day. It is called the Brahmaputra bath.

Mother: Yes, I have heard of it. All right, you take me there this time. I shall see your native place and make a pilgrimage too.

Disciple: Mother, will East Bengal (now Bangladesh) have this good fortune?

Mother: Why not? There are many devotees of the "Master there. Naren went there, Sarat went there, and many others also. Why should I not go to a place where people adore the Master?

The Prasada contained pulse soup, two varieties of mixed curry and a sour soup. Now the Mother said, "Serve them fish."

Disciple: No, Mother, I am satisfied with the Prasada itself; I won't take fish.

Mother: How is that, dear? You are a woman whose husband is living, and you won't take fish! Why haven't you painted your soles with lac-dye?

Disciple: In our part of the country painting of the soles with lac-dye is not in vogue. Conch-bangles on the hand and mark of vermillion on the forehead indicate that a woman's husband is living.

Mother: It may be, but in this part of the country women wear conch-bangles and vermillion as a fancy. Here iron wristlets and lac-dye are the signs of a woman whose husband is alive.

The Mother was served with milk, a mango and a sweet. She mixed them, ate a little and said, "I am leaving the remaining portion for your son." When the meal was over, I was about to remove the leaf-plate when Lakshmi- Didi

hurriedly came and caught hold of it. I was not willing to part with the plate, but neither would Lakshmi-Didi leave it. At last the Mother stood up and said, "Allow Lakshmi to carry it. Among them you are the oldest; since they are here, why should you carry it?" Thus I was compelled to leave the plate. Then I accompanied the Mother to the washing place. The Mother filled a pot with water from the bucket and gave it to me, saying, "Wash your mouth and hands." I felt very awkward. I said, "Mother, I can't obey you." The Mother said, "Why not? It will bring you good if you do what I say. Come, hurry up and wash; there are others waiting behind you. Well, touch the water-pot with your forehead." Having no other course left open, I obeyed her command. After this, as I was moving away, the Mother said, "What's this? Why did you not wash your feet?" I said, "I shall wash them later." The Mother said, "No, no, come. I shall pour the water." Then I went up behind the Mother and said, "Mother, I can't do this." The Mother replied, "What's the matter? First sprinkle some water on your head. If you listen to my words, it will be for your good." And so with no other course open, I did as she told me, and at her directive I followed her to her room.

Entering the room, the Mother stood as if taken aback, and after a moment cried out, "O, what have you done? What will my son take?" I noticed that a certain woman devotee was saying to herself, "Everything will be eaten by her children, and we shall die of starvation!" and was merrily eating the Prasada the Mother had kept for Ni-. Seeing this, I laughed heartily. Lakshmi-Didi and the other woman present also finally began to laugh too. I could hardly control my laughter, but the Mother appeared very concerned and stood there quietly. Then the Mother sent some one to enquire whether the cook had closed the kitchen, and if not what food had been left behind. Learning that there were some rice, pulse and curry, the Mother said, "Well, ask the cook to bring a small quantity of each of them." When the cook brought them on a plate, the Mother mixed them together, ate a little from it and left the remaining portion covered, saying, "This is for my son." Standing behind her, I was wondering how the Mother could eat rice twice. I was also musing how I could offer a small personal service to the Mother. I had used water given by her for cleaning my mouth and washing my feet, but I could give no service to her. I was walking behind the Mother. When she had entered the shrine room she said to me, "My towel is hanging on the panel of the door; please bring it and wipe my feet" Hearing this, I was overwhelmed with joy. I brought the towel, and then the Mother said, "Well, let me sit on the cot. Please wipe the soles of my feet nicely." While I wiped

her feet, I touched them with my head several times. Smiling a little, the Mother said, "All right, stop now."

Lakshmi-Didi brought a betel leaf and said, smiling, "Fortunate you are; the Mother showed a favour on you unasked for. Now take a betel roll." But blinded by tears, I couldn't see it. The Mother took the betel roll and gave it to me, saying, "Now spread that mat on the floor and cover it with that carpet, and place those three pillows." When the bed was prepared, the Mother lay down. Sitting close to her I began to massage her feet, when she said, "Now lie down by my side." Seeing my hesitation, the Mother said, "Lie down placing your head on my pillow." I said, "No, Mother, when I fall asleep my feet may touch your body, so I won't lie down." The Mother replied, "How is that, dear? I'm telling you, lie down." I was in a fix. I had to follow her order. The Mother said, "I found much joy in meeting you, just as a mother feels joy at the home-coming of her daughter from her father-in-law's house after a long time. Well, when will you return home?" I said, "I shall leave this evening. Mother, kindly remember me, your beggar daughter." Saying this, I began to weep. The Mother said, "Oh, dear, dear! Why do you speak thus? You are my princess. I myself have initiated you. You have nothing to feel sad about. You needn't worry; I shall look after everything for you, in all conditions."

Radhu returned from her school at four o'clock. After she had taken snacks, the Mother said to her, "Come, I shall braid your hair." Radhu replied, "No, I shall do it myself." As the Mother took a comb to braid her hair, Radhu began to hit the Mother with it. The Mother remarked, "Mad girl! What shall I do with her?" Then Yogin-Ma came and made Pranam to the Mother. Finding Radhu hitting the Mother, she said, "What is this! Why should Radhu hit our Mother? I'll punish her." But Radhu would not stop. Then the Mother said, "I shall call Sarat; I can't tolerate any more pain." Yogin-Ma told Revered Sarat Maharaj, who came out from his room on the ground floor and shouted, "Oh Radhu, don't hurt the Mother." On hearing his voice Radhu was quick to retreat. Kusum-Didi said, "Come, I shall braid your hair." Just like a well-behaved girl, Radhu quietly went up to her and sat very close. At that moment, Radhu's mother came to announce, "Just see, one of your disciples has come with something in hand. If it is a piece of cloth, I shall use it for the top of my mosquito net." Truly, Ni- had come with some fruits, sweets and a cloth. As soon as he saluted the Mother, the latter said, "Ah! The cloth is fine. And the sweets and fruits are very good too. O Golap, take them and keep them ready. When the shrine opens they

should be offered to the Master. Ah! My son's face looks dry. Now wash your hands and face and then have some Prasad. May you live long, my son, and may you have devotion. But you shall have to marry." Ni-saluted the Mother and went downstairs. Golap-Ma followed him, carrying the dish containing the Prasad. Then Radhu's mother began to make an importunate demand, saying, "Give me those two Saris. I shall make the top of my mosquito net with them." The Mother said, "How can it be? My son will feel hurt." A little later the Mother said to Kusum- Didi, "Please bring a Sari for me." Yogin-Ma observed, "See how fortunate they are. Who are they, I wonder? In just one day they-have received so much of compassion from the Mother. Blessed girl you are! I feel like saluting you." Hearing this I shrank—what is she saying! Then the Mother remarked, "They belong to East Bengal. They have great faith. It is beneficial even to see such people."

Once again I wiped the Mother's feet with a towel. The Mother put on a fresh Sari, sat on the asana for the worship, and began to pray to the Master, "O Lord, look after their welfare. They love you even more than their own lives and so they have come to me from a far away land encountering many difficulties." Later, the Mother called me and asked, "Have you any questions to ask?"

Disciple: Mother, I have been surprised to find young widows here taking fish. In our part of the country it is prohibited by society.

Mother: Do you know what this is? This is but local and regional custom. In our part, young widows are allowed to take fish and wear bordered saris and jewellery. They naturally harbour these desires. If they are restricted from eating fish, they will take it stealthily. When they become convinced that they are doing something against social injunction, they will give it up.

Disciple: Mother, can the desire for enjoyment be given up?

Mother: No, dear, what you say is true. But when people grow up, they see the behaviour of others and feel ashamed of their own conduct. Besides, at the time of quarrels, they have to suffer caustic comments, and so they restrain themselves of their own accord.

Disciple: Well, Mother, you being a Brahmana lady, how could you take rice twice?

Mother: What do you mean, dear? When did I eat rice twice?

Disciple: At the time when you gave Prasad to my son.

Mother: I can do everything for the welfare of my children.

There is no harm in it. Besides, in the case of Prasad it is not objectionable to eat even five times! Consecrated food is not like ordinary food. Don't let your mind be disturbed over these trifles. It will make you forget the Lord. Whatever people may say, remember the Master and do what you consider to be correct. The Master used to say, "Look upon people as worms." By this he did not mean all kinds of men. He was referring only to fault-finders and people of mean tendencies.

It was now time for me to depart. A carriage was waiting for me. With tears in her eyes the Mother stroked my head and said, "Come again." I could not bear the idea of departing. I caught hold of the Mother's feet and began to weep. The Mother said, "Don't weep, dear; I am already your own. Come again."

This was my first and the last meeting with the Holy Mother. Her blessings and loving words of consolation are the treasures of my life.

13: Recorded by an Anonymous Male Devotee

Some days after he had received initiation from the Holy Mother, there cropped up in Lalmohan's (Swami Kapileswarananda's) mind a doubt: "What have I done? Alas I took initiation from a woman." This gradually developed into a severe mental anguish. Finally he decided that he would abandon the Mantra unless the Master resolved his mental conflict in a day's time. The next day Lalmohan, under the instruction of Revered Baburam Maharaj, (Swami Premananda) carried cow's milk to the Holy Mother's house at Calcutta. As soon as he stood up after saluting the Holy Mother, she said to him, "Look, I didn't give you the Mantra it was the Master who gave it." A few days later, this doubt haunted his mind again. An idea struck him now: "I shall believe that the Master himself has given me initiation, only if Haren Babu comes to announce that he has received power from the Mother." Some days later, at the time of the Master's birthday festival, Haren Babu actually came and said, "Today I have been favoured with a special power from the Holy Mother." Then only did all his uncertainties vanish.

Once it was decided for some particular reason that the services of the Brahmana cook in the Udbodhan house should be dispensed with. But because this would cause inconvenience to the Holy Mother, the monastic Head of the Centre did not then carry out this decision. When the matter was reported to the Mother, she remarked, "After all, you are monks. Renunciation is your goal. Indeed, can't you renounce a cook?"

Once a monk of the Belur Math slapped a servant for insubordination. When this news reached the ears of the Mother, she said "They are monks; they are supposed to live under trees. But, now they are having monasteries, buildings and servants. What is more, one of them has gone even to the length of beating a servant!"

Swami Brajeswarananda had gone to ask for the Mother's permission to practise austerities in Uttarakhand. On hearing him, the Mother said. "This is the month of Kartika (October-November); all the four doors to the abode of Yama are open now. Being your mother, how can I grant you permission now?"

A certain person had committed a contemptible offence. Some people advised the Mother to inflict severe punishment on him. But the Mother said, "I am his mother. How can I do such a thing?'"

Once a devotee said to the Mother, "I am very poor, Mother. I wish to come and see you now and then, but as I am not able to bring the offerings I would like, I don't come regularly." On hearing this, the compassionate Mother said affectionately, "My child, don't worry about it. Whenever you desire to see me, bring simply one myrobalan fruit:'

A certain devotee had gone to see the Mother. She asked him, "Have you been initiated by me?" The devotee replied, "Yes, Mother. But I am very much tied down to worldly life, I am unmarried, and yet I have to remain busy with many family affairs. What will happen to me, Mother?"

Saying, "Let me see," the Mother stretched out her hand to touch the chest of the devotee, and the latter hurriedly began to unbutton his coat. After she had stretched out her hand to some extent she remarked, "You need not remove your coat. You will certainly achieve the goal, otherwise my hand would not have moved in that direction. I have given you nothing of my own, but only that which I received from the Master. If it doesn't prove efficacious, he himself will have to come to your help."

One day the mother of a monk proposed to the Holy Mother that her son should go back to the worldly life, The Mother said to her, "It is a great fortune to be the mother of a monk. But people cannot give up attachment to even a brass pot; how could they then think of renouncing the world? You are his mother. Why should you worry? Though he has become a monk, he will serve you."

Once in the course of a conversation, the Mother told a certain devotee, "The Master is really God who assumed a human body to remove the sufferings of men. He moved about just as a king walks through his city in disguise, and he left the world as soon as his identity was discovered."

During the Mother's last stay at Jayrambati, one day the woman cook returned at about nine in the evening and announced, "I have touched a dog. I shall have to take a bath now." The Mother said, "Don't take a bath so late in the evening. Wash your hands and feet, and change your Sari." The cook asked, "Will it suffice?" The Mother replied, "Well, then sprinkle a little

water of the Ganges on your body." But this suggestion could not satisfy her either. So finally the Mother said, "All right, then touch me."

Now and then Swami Jnanananda used to prepare various kinds of dishes at Nabasan and carry them to Jayrambati. On his way some people of a certain village were surprised at the frequent visits of the Swami, and one day one of them remarked, "Ah, into what delusion he has fallen!" When Swami Jnanananda reported this to the Mother, she animatedly said, "See, my child, they are very worldly-minded people. They belong to a different class. They will again and again come to the world and go rotting in their worldly life. If at any time they are blessed by God, only then can they be liberated."

A devotee named Rajendralal Dutta asked the Mother, "I am a Kayastha, Mother. Can I offer cooked rice to Sri Ramakrishna?" The Mother replied, "You are his child, my son. What harm can there be if you offer him cooked rice? You can do so without any hesitation."

One day Pitambar Nath, a devotee from Dacca, was talking with the Mother, sitting on the verandah of her house at Jayrambati. The Mother was in her room and said, "My son, come into the room and speak." The devotee said, "Mother, let me sit here in the verandah. I belong to a low caste." At this the Mother replied, "Who says you belong to a low caste? You are my child; enter the room and take your seat."

One day at the Udbodhan house the compassion of the Holy Mother was being discussed. Yogin-Ma, staring at the Mother, said smilingly, "The Mother, no doubt, loves us all very much, but it is not as intense as the Master's was. What concern and love he had towards his disciples! We saw it with our own eyes. Words cannot describe it." The Mother said, "Is it to be wondered at? He accepted only a few select disciples and that too after various kinds of testing. And towards me he has pushed a whole row of ants!"

One day while speaking about Sri Ramakrishna, the Mother said, "The Master, who was such a great renouncer, nonetheless worried about me. One day he asked me, 'How much do you need for your pocket expenses?' I said, 'Five or six rupees will be enough.' Next he asked, 'How many chapatis do you eat in the evening?' I felt very embarrassed and wondered how I could answer. But as he insisted on a reply, I said, 'I eat five or six.'" One day an enraged Radhu told the Mother slightingly, "What do you know? Can you

comprehend the worth of a husband?" On hearing this, the Mother laughingly remarked, "That's true! My husband was but a naked Sadhu!"

Once in the course of a chat Swami Keshavananda said to the Mother, "After you, Mother, no one will revere goddesses like Sasthi and Sitala." "Why not?" said the Mother, "They are my parts."

Another day Swami Keshavananda said to her, "Either rectify the wrong attitudes of the people of our locality or relieve me of my urge for philanthropic work. None is there to build; they know only how to destroy." At this the Mother replied, "The Master used to say, 'The Malaya breeze transforms all trees with substance into sandal wood.' Since the breeze of divine grace has come, now all trees (meaning aspirants), excepting bamboo and banana, will turn into sandal wood."

Then someone asked her, "Mother, your relations have enjoyed so much of your holy company, still why do they not show the least glimmer of wisdom?" The Mother replied, "They are like bamboos and silk-cotton trees. Even if they grow close to a sandal wood tree, what will it profit them? The trees must have some essence."

Once a woman devotee asked her, "Mother, why can't we realize that you are the Divine Mother?" She replied, "How can everybody recognize divinity, daughter? There lay a diamond at a bathing place. Taking it as an ordinary stone, people rubbed the soles of their feet against it after their bath to remove the dry skin. One day a jeweller went there. Seeing the stone, he immediately recognized that it was a big precious diamond."

Once as the Mother was leaving Jayrambati for Calcutta, her aunt, the mother of Uncle Surya, came to her and said, "Dear Sarada, don't forget us, come back soon." The Mother touched the floor or her room with her forehead and quoting a Sanskrit proverb, said, "One's mother and motherland are superior to heaven itself."'

Once a young male disciple of the Holy Mother very unexpectedly received a marriage proposal from the family of a distinguished, wealthy man. He was offered a large sum of money which would remove his pecuniary difficulties for almost his entire life. The young man had secured an M.A. degree and was serving as the headmaster of a school. As his mind was not altogether free from desire for enjoyments, he wanted to learn the Holy

Mother's view on the marriage proposal. So he raised the topic before her at Jayrambati. It was May 1915. Hearing everything, the Mother said, "My son, you are doing fine. Why do you want to get burnt in the fire of worldliness? You are doing a noble work; you are helping many boys to receive education. They will turn out good by their association with you, and that will bring good to you also." The young man said, "Mother, I do not feel quite confident, for my mind at times gets restless and rushes towards enjoyments." At this Mother said, "You need not entertain any fear. I say, in the Kali Yuga the mental commission of a sin is no sin at all. Free your mind from all such worries. You have nothing to fear." Ever since the devotee heard these words of assurance of the Holy Mother, he never thought of marriage, nor did he feel perturbed by monetary worries.

One morning a girl from the hostel of the Sister Nivedita Girls' School came to see the Mother, who was doing Japa at the time. After a while the Mother asked various questions concerning the girls of the hostel as well as about a boy named Kalu, about what sights the girl saw on her way, etc. When she failed to give satisfactory answers, the Mother said to her, "Look, my, daughter, take notice of your surroundings when you move through a place. And you must also keep yourself informed of everything that happens at the place where you live; but you should not gossip about it."

One afternoon the girls of that hostel visited the Mother. Golap-Ma approached the Mother and said, "Mother, please tell them a little about the Master." In response the Mother said, "What shall I say further about the Master? Many important pieces of information connected with him have come out in the Kathamrita written by Master Mahasaya. Ah! How many more teachings about the Master would have been published had Master Mahasaya maintained good health! How many people would have been benefited by them! What has already been published is a priceless treasure. Could I realize then that even the casual words of the Master would be comparable to the Vedas? Just see, how beautiful was the way in which the Master taught—see how, recalling his experiences at the Haldarpukur, he used them as illustrations in his teachings! It was his nature to explain his teachings through anecdotes from everyday life."

A devotee asked the Mother, "The Master said, 'Those who come here (meaning those who accept Sri Ramakrishna as the spiritual ideal) will not be born again.' Again, Swamiji said, 'None can have liberation without being initiated into Sannyasa.' Then what is the way for householders?" The

Mother replied, "Yes, what the Master said is true, and what Swamiji said is also true. Householders need not have external renunciation. Internal renunciation will come to them of itself. But some people need external renunciation also. Why do you fear? Surrender yourself' to the Master and always remember that he is behind you."

In 1910 at Jayrambati the Mother told a monk regarding spiritual practices, "Every morning and evening perform Japa and meditation with a cool brain. It is not an easy task. Compared to meditation, it is easier to till a plot of land." Pointing to a picture of Sri Ramakrishna, she further said, "Nothing can be attained without his grace." When the monk submitted that the work of the monastery kept one too busy to find time for regularly performing Japa and meditation, the Mother said, "Whose work are you doing? It is His work only." She continued, saying, "In time to come, your mind itself will turn into your Guru and advise you."

Once in the course of a conversation the Mother said, "I am the mother of the virtuous as well as the wicked." She used to tell her disciples, "Why should you worry?"

14: Recorded by Dr. Surendranath Roy

One Sunday, out of a strong desire to see the Holy Mother, I started from my Calcutta residence at half-past two and arrived, profusely perspiring, at the Udbodhan house. On inquiry I learnt that the Mother had only just returned from some engagement outside, and that she would be meeting visitors only a little later. Feeling very impatient, I however, proceeded to go to her. Swami Saradananda, who was standing near the staircase, saw me going, and forbade me. Young as I then was, I immediately retorted, "Is she only your Mother?" and pushed him aside and went upstairs. I found the Mother fanning herself. After I bowed down at her feet she inquired about me and said, "How is it that you are perspiring?" I said, "I walked in the hot sun." Taking the fan from her, I began to fan her.

After a while I asked the Mother, "Where did you go today?" The Mother replied, "Kalighat." Then she said, "Take some Prasad, and then I shall talk with you." After taking the Prasad, I asked her, "Mother, what is the difference between man in his real nature and a god?"

Mother: It is man who becomes a god. Everything is possible if one does work properly.

Disciple: What kind of work?

Mother: Observing the rules and injunctions prescribed by the Master, if one calls upon one's Chosen Ideal with steadfastness, one achieves everything.

On this day I could not talk with the Mother any longer; for one or two women devotees came. I saluted the Mother. As I was taking leave of her, I said, "Mother, I have done a great wrong today. While climbing the stairs I pushed Sarat Maharaj aside. How shall I face him again? Kindly pardon me." The Mother said, "What wrong can children do? My sons are not such as to find fault with others. You need not worry about it." Coming to the ground floor, I came across Sarat Maharaj. I bowed down to him and asked his forgiveness for the offence. Sarat Maharaj embraced me and said, placing his hand on my head, "One should have such yearning, indeed!" Then he added, "None will obstruct you henceforth." I welcomed his blessings. But after this incident, whenever he saw me he used to laugh heartily.

On another Sunday when I went to see the Holy Mother, I found that some devotees had already arrived and that others were coming. As I made Pranam to the Mother, she said, "Sit for a while." She gave me some Prasad which I began to eat. Then I said to her, "Mother, I don't find a day when I can disclose to you everything that's in my mind."

Mother: I have to attend to the problems of all my children. But you may ask one or two questions. I shall answer them.

Disciple: Mother, there are very poor people who cannot afford to travel to Varanasi or any such holy place. How can they gain the merit which others visiting those places obtain?

Mother: Why, they can gain the same merit by visiting Dakshineswar or Belur Math, provided they have such genuine faith! He for whom one visits Varanasi is present at Dakshineswar and Belur Math.

Disciple: Mother, what is the way for us?

Mother: Why do you fear? The Master himself will do everything for those who have received his blessings or have somehow come in contact with him.

After this I made Pranam to Mother; for I had to take leave. I shall now give a brief account of a conversation I had with her on some later occasion

Disciple: Mother, what procedure should we adopt for doing Japa and meditation?

Mother: Do them as you like, provided you keep your mind steadfast in the Lord. You will attain to your goal in this way. Why do you worry?

Disciple: Mother, I'm not worried, but I want to hear the instructions from your lips.

Mother: Everybody is behind you. The Master is there. And besides, you can see me directly.

Disciple: Mother, I was not fortunate enough to see Swamiji or Sri Ramakrishna.

Mother: Call on Him devotedly; you will attain everything. I say, you are blessed; for you have been born in such an age. This is the time when you can see His divine sport. One can easily understand this divine play if he looks upon it with faith and devotion.

Disciple: Mother, does everything happen and are a man's aspirations fulfilled according to his own wish?

Mother: Only the noble desires are fulfilled.

15: Recorded by Swami Visweswarananda

In the morning the Mother was making arrangements for worshipping in the shrine of the Udbodhan house. In the course of conversation I asked her, "Why do you have so much attachment? Day and night you talk of nothing but Radhu, just like people terribly entangled in the world. Many devotees come to you but you pay no heed to them. Is such deep attachment good for you?" I had spoken to her in this strain several times earlier also. At this, the Mother used to reply humbly, "I am a woman, and I follow my womanly nature." But today the Mother said rather animatedly, "Where will you find another like me? See if you can find my peer. Do you know, those who are much given to contemplation on God develop a subtle and pure mind. Whatever object such a mind takes hold of, it sticks to it tenaciously. That's why it appears like attachment. A flash of lightning is seen in the glass panes but not in the wooden shutters."

Once I said, "Mother, my mind is never disturbed by evil thoughts." Mother immediately became startled and said, "Don't say like that. It is too presumptuous for one to speak in that strain."

Another day I told her, "Mother, you give initiation to so many people, but you never enquire about them. You don't even give a thought about what is happening to them. A Guru keeps a keen eye on his disciple, seeing whether he is developing spiritually. It would be better if you did not give initiation to so many people. You should initiate only as many as you can keep touch with." The Mother replied, "But the Master never forbade me to do so. He explained so many things to me. Could he not have told me something about this as well? I entrust the Master with their responsibility. I pray to him every day, 'Please look after them wherever they may be.' Besides, do you know that the Master himself taught me these Mantras? He gave me Mantras possessing great power."

One day while discussing about bija-mantra, the Mother disclosed to me many Mantras and remarked, "I have given you everything I had in my bag. Will you give spiritual initiation to others?"

Disciple: No, Mother. I myself haven't achieved anything.

Mother: Well, what's the harm in giving initiation? You can give.

Disciple: Mother, please make me renounce everything so that I don't have attachment for anything.

Mother: You are an all-renouncer already. Will you grow two horns now?

Another day at Jayrambati I asked the Mother, "How can one realize God?—through worship, Japa or meditation?

Mother: By none of these.

Disciple: Then how?

Mother: God is realized only through His grace. Nonetheless, one must perform Japa and meditation, for they remove the impurities of one's mind. One must practise spiritual disciplines such as worship, Japa, and meditation. As one gets the fragrance of a flower by handling it or the scent of the sandalwood by rubbing it against a stone, similarly one becomes spiritually awakened by continuously contemplating on the Divine. But you can become illumined right now, if you become desireless.

One day at Jayrambati after my meal I was about to remove the used plate, when the Mother prevented me, catching hold of my hand, and taking the plate herself. I said, "Why should you do this, Mother? I shall remove it." At this she said, "What, after all, have I done for you? A child, as you know, soils the lap of its mother. And how much more besides! You are indeed a rare treasure even to the gods."

16: Recorded by Mahendra Nath Gupta

Two or three days after the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna in March 1914, I went one afternoon to the Udbodhan house with a letter of introduction from a certain devotee living at Barisal. Rashbehari Maharaj (Swami Arupananda) read the contents of the letter and then went to see the Mother. On returning, he conveyed to me the following message from her: "The purpose of taking initiation is to try to realize God through simple spiritual practices. It should not upset the livelihood of the family Guru. I may grant the boy's prayer if he will honour his family Guru as much as he will honour me in case I give him initiation, and if he agrees to enhance as much as he can his annual contribution to the family Guru." When I agreed to these proposals, Rashbehari Maharaj escorted me to the Holy Mother. Two days later I received initiation from her and my mind was absorbed in an indescribable mood for a week after this.

The Mother had asked me at the time of initiation, “Are you a Sakta or a Vaishnava?" On hearing my reply she gave me the Mantra. Seven or eight years later I learnt from my mother that it was the same Mantra as adopted by our family, and the Holy Mother had only added the Bija to it.

Two months after this, my wife became eager to receive initiation, and so I took her to the Holy Mother. The Mother said to her, "From your appearance it seems that you have a suckling baby. With whom have you left him?" My wife said, "I have not brought the infant for fear that he might dirty this holy place." Learning that the child was only three months old, the Mother said to my wife, "Why do you say so? Who told you that the excreta or urine of so small an infant can defile a place? Children are like Narayana and you should take care of them with that attitude. Go home just now; otherwise the baby may be deprived of its mother's milk. Come here after four days. The Master willing, you will have initiation. But don't forget to bring your baby."

As I was waiting downstairs, I thought: "I shall be convinced that the Mother loves me dearly if she shares with me some of the food she eats." Half an hour later I went to bow down to the Mother, when I found her eating a sweetmeat. As her glance fell on me, she said, "My child, eat this sweet first and then salute me." Being favoured with this unexpected Prasad, I forgot to salute the Mother altogether. After a while she herself reminded me, saying, "Now make salutation to me and then go home."

The Mother's instruction to come for initiation after four days made us sad and worried. But on returning home I understood from my wife's health the Mother's foresight in telling her to wait.

We went to salute the Mother before we left for Barisal. The Mother said, "Go carefully. The Master will protect you from dangers on your way." On our journey a severe storm overtook us and our lives were in danger. When we arrived at our destination, everyone of us felt convinced that it was only the Mother's blessings which had protected us.

A year later, in the month of Vaisakh (April-May), I saw the Mother again at Jayrambati, and this time I got the opportunity of coming in very close contact with her. Sitting in front of me, the Mother would feed me affectionately, and I would become filled with joy.

Assuming that I would be benefited more if I practised Japa and meditation while living close to the Mother, one day at Jayrambati I performed Japa and meditation arduously. While I made Pranam to the Mother on that day, she said, 'You have come to your Mother; what's the need of so much spiritual practice now? I am doing everything for you. Now eat, drink and enjoy yourself, free from all anxiety."

The next day I desired to offer flowers and sandal paste at the Mother's feet. But how was I to procure them in such an unfamiliar place? While I was thinking in this strain, the Mother sent to me a young girl belonging to the family of the Mother's brothers. She was carrying flowers and sandal paste, and conveyed the Mother's message: "If my son desires to offer these, he may come now and offer them."

On the third day the Mother was suffering from pain in her leg. She had a mild fever too. At about ten o'clock another devotee came and, not being aware of the Mother's ill health, saluted her by touching her feet. The Mother said, "I have a severe pain in my leg. Don't salute me by touching my feet. The Master will certainly bless you." Bilash Maharaj, who was present, asked the Mother, "The scriptures, I am told, prohibit making Pranam to a person who is ill or lying down. What really happens if one does so?" Immediately, the Mother said, "Yes, my child, Pranam made in such circumstances fixes the disease in the person. Nobody should be saluted during his illness."

About three years later during the Christmas holidays I saw Mother for the last time. It was the occasion of her birthday celebration. In the morning that day the Mother told me and a certain monastic member of the Koalpara monastery, "Go to Sibu at Kamarpukur. He will purchase a pitcherful of milk and collect some flowers. Bring them here quickly." To this, Bilash Maharaj-added, "The Mother has difficulty if she takes her meal late. So you must return by nine o'clock, otherwise you may not get a chance to offer flowers to her." Nonetheless, it became half-past eleven when we returned. I felt very sorry thinking that we had missed the chance of making offerings to the Holy Mother. Bilash Maharaj rebuked me for being late and said, "The Mother is waiting for you." Just at that moment the Mother appeared from somewhere, took the basket of flowers from my hand, and said, "How beautiful the flowers are! You should first worship the Lord with them. Quickly take your bath and come." Bathing over, we came and found that some of the flowers were kept arranged for us to make offerings with. The Mother's incomprehensible affection captivated us.

17: Recorded by Swami Tanmayananda

Once I was suffering terribly from colic. One day I was feeling drowsy, and in that condition I seemed to hear someone telling me to take water sanctified by the feet of my Guru, The next day I went to Jayrambati and drank a little water sanctified by the feet of the Holy Mother, I said to her, "Mother, I had a desire to worship your feet, but now I have drunk water." The Mother said, "What's wrong in that? Come into the room."

After worshipping her feet, I placed them on my head. At this the, Mother said, "Ah, foolish child, should you place a person's feet on your head! The Lord resides there."

Disciple: Mother, I have not seen the Master.

Mother: The Master is God Himself.

Disciple: If the Master is God, then who are you?

Mother: Who else am I?

Disciple: If you so wish, You can show me the Master.

Mother: When the Master touched Naren (Swami Vivekananda), the latter got alarmed. Practise spiritual disciplines and you shall see him.

Disciple: What's the need of spiritual disciplines for a person who has you as the Guru?

Mother: Yes, that's true. But the point is this: the house may have all kinds of food-stuff for cooking, but one must cook them and take his meal. He who cooks earlier gets his meal earlier too. Some eat in the morning, some in the evening, and there are yet others who starve because they are lazy and reluctant to cook.

Disciple: Mother, I don't understand what you mean.

Mother: The more arduously one practises spiritual disciplines, the more quickly one will attain to God. Even if he doesn't practise any spiritual

disciplines he will attain to Him at the last moment of his life-he will certainly. But the person who spends his time raising a hue and cry without practising spiritual disciplines will take a long time. You have renounced the world for performing spiritual practices. But as you are not able to practise them always, you should do work, looking upon it as the Master's work. Since you suffer from colic, you should avoid too austere a life. Take care about your food. This disease is not fatal, but it is painful.

While living at the Koalpara monastery it was my duty to clean the kitchen and scour the brass pots two times daily. It was rainy season. As my hands got often wet by scouring the pots, they became sore. I was suffering. One day I went to Jayrambati. When I made Pranam to the Mother, she enquired, "Well, dear, are you keeping all right?"

Disciple: No, not quite.

Mother: Why? Are you having pain in your stomach again?¬

Disciple: No, Mother, I'm not suffering from colic now, but my hands have developed sores because of frequent contact with water. I have to scour and clean cooking pots two times a day.

Mother: 'A man eager to keep away from acid food builds a home under a tamarind tree'—so goes the proverb. Whereas you have renounced the world to repeat God's name, you are now entangled in activities. The Ashrama has become your second world. People come to a monastery renouncing their families, but they become so deluded that they don't want to leave the Ashrama. Since you are not keeping good health, you should go to Daharkund. There you should teach the boys as much as you can, and practise meditation and worship.

Disciple: Mother, I wish to go to a lonely place and perform austerities, but I'm not keeping good health.

Mother: Now, keep yourself engaged with some work, and when you feel a strong urge, you may go for practising austerities.

Disciple: I perform Japa but my mind doesn't become steady.

Mother: Whether the mind becomes steady or not, practise Japa. It will be nice if you can perform a certain number of Japa daily.

Disciple: Bless me so that I may have a vision of the Master.

Mother: You have seen him in dream; well, you will have his vision.

Another day on my way to Jayrambati I was thinking that I would be very glad if I could do some personal service to them other. On arriving at her house, I found her sitting with her legs stretched out. A cup containing massaging oil was kept by her side. I began to rub her leg with the oil. The Mother said, "See, I feel acute pain in this leg. Rub oil on this leg putting some pressure." I did it for about twenty-five minutes. Then the Mother said, "Are you satisfied, now? I shall go for my bath now, and then I shall have to perform the worship of the Master. Take your food here before you leave."

Disciple: No, Mother, I have to go right now. I shall come some other day.

Mother: No, no, I say. Kedar (Swami Kesavananda), I suppose, has forbidden you. Will you obey me or listen to him? Tell Kedar that the Mother did not permit you to go.

18: Recorded by Swami Parameswarananda

It was the birthday of the Holy Mother in the month of Pous (December-January). The Mother was sitting on a cot in her room at Jayrambati, keeping Radhu's child in her lap. Everybody was worshipping the Mother by offering flowers and sandal paste at her feet. I put a string of large marigold flowers round her neck and offered flowers at her feet. Then I said, "Mother, today is your birthday. Many devotees wish to see you and worship you, but they are not able to come to such an inaccessible place. On this auspicious day, I pray for your blessings on behalf of everybody. Kindly give your blessings, Mother, for the good of all." The Mother graciously said, "Yes, my son, I pray to the Master, for the welfare of all. May he bring good to all!"

As desired by the Mother, I was at this time staying with her. I was kept very busy with many duties like performing the worship of the Master. One day I heard that a few monks of the Belur Math were going out for practising austerities, and so I said to the Mother, "Perhaps it is not good for me to remain confined to all these duties. I want to go and practise austerities. Please give me your permission." The Mother said, "Why so, my child? You are doing my work. You are doing the Master's work. Are these in any way less worthy than austerities? It will be futile for you now to go out. When you feel a really strong urge to practise austerities, well, go for a month or two."

Jayrambati was infested with malaria. Intermittent fever had made the Mother's health very bad. So at the bidding of the revered Sarat Maharaj, no interview with the Mother was permitted for some time. During this period a certain devotee from Barisal came and expressed his great eagerness to see the Mother, but I refused to allow him. And so a heated argument ensued. The noise gradually reached the Mother's ears. She came to the door greatly excited and said, "Why do you prevent him from seeing me?" I said, "Sarat Maharaj has imposed this restriction. If you give initiation when you are ill, your health will deteriorate further." The Mother replied, "Who is Sarat to say that? I am born for this purpose. I shall initiate him." Then the Mother said to the devotee, "Come, my child. Take your meal today. You will have initiation tomorrow." The gentleman, however, had taken the resolve of taking his meal after he was initiated.

One evening the Mother was sitting quietly on the verandah of her new house, when we went to prostrate at her feet. Of her own, she began to say, "Just see. K- says, 'Out of greed for good dishes, the boys (monastic workers) are moving from one Ashrama to another.' Do you see how he speaks? Why should my children—the children of the Master—suffer for want of food? Certainly this will never be. I myself prayed to the Master, 'O Lord, please see that your children never suffer from want of food.' How can he say that the boys move about goaded by gluttony? Why should they not take good food? Only he who has attachment will suffer."

After finishing her worship of the Master, the Mother was sitting quietly in the shrine, when one of my fellow disciples suddenly asked, "Mother, how do you look upon the Master?" The Mother remained silent for a while, and then said solemnly, "I look upon him as my child."

One day the Mother said spontaneously, "Look, do not try to start a sensation by shouting vande mataram. Rather you should make looms and weave cloth. I wish to spin thread if I can get a spinning wheel. Do constructive work."

In the course of conversation I said to the Mother one day, "Mother, such is our mental condition that at times our mind becomes so distracted that we are seized with fear lest we should be drowned!" The Mother replied, "How's that, my child? Why should you be drowned? You are the children of the Master; why should you be drowned? No, never. The Master will protect you."

The Mother was then staying at the Jagadamba Ashrama at Koalpara. One day she said, "You see, I saw the Master here today after a pretty long time. He was taking rest after his meal."

One day I asked, "Mother, how does one attain to knowledge of Brahman? In the beginning does one have to practise Sadhana step by step? Or does it come spontaneously?" The Mother replied, "This is a very difficult path. Call upon the Master. He will make you understand this at the right time."

19: Recorded by Dr. Umesh Chandradatta

One day at Jayrambati the Mother said, "Look, my child, in my young days I would see a young girl who resembled me moving with me and helping me in all my work. She used to have fun and frolic with me. This continued till I was ten or eleven years old."

One day the Mother said, "Sometime after the passing away of the Master, I began to see the vision of a bearded Sannyasin who asked me to perform panchatapa. In the beginning I didn't pay much attention to it. I hardly knew what panchatapa was. But the Sannyasin gradually put pressure on me. So I asked Yogin about panchatapa, and she said, Very good, Mother, I shall also perform it.' Arrangements were made for panchatapa. I was then living in Nilambar Babu's house. Blazing fires of dried cow-dung were lighted on four sides, and there was the intense heat of the sun above. After my morning bath I approached the fires and saw them burning brightly. I was seized with much fear. I wondered how I would be able to enter the area and remain seated there until sunset. But repeating the name of the Master, I entered the area and the fires seemed to have lost their heat. I practised this discipline for seven days. But, my child, it made my complexion dark like black ash. After this I didn't see that figure of the Sannyasin again."

Once I asked, "Mother, the Master remarked that those who take refuge in him are living their last birth. Now, what will be the fate of those who take refuge in you?"

Mother: What else will happen, my child? The same is the case here too.

Disciple: Mother, what will happen to those who receive spiritual initiation from you but do not perform Japa and meditation at all?

Mother: What else will happen? Why do you worry so much? The desires in your mind—you must first fulfil them. Later on you will attain to eternal peace in the Ramakrishna Loka. The Master has created a new kingdom for all of you.

A certain devotee forgot the method of counting Japa on his fingers and so wrote me a letter asking me to get it clarified from the Holy Mother. On hearing this, the Mother remarked, "Is that of much consequence? Well, you

can do it just as it suits you. All this is meant for gaining concentration of mind?"

One day I asked the Mother about liberation and devotion. In reply she said, "Liberation may be granted at any moment. But God is reluctant to bestow devotion." And she left the place immediately. She said these words in such a way that it appeared that to grant liberation was in her hand.

As regards purity and impurity, the Mother one day said, "You see, my son, the Master had a weak stomach. When I lived in the Nahabat, I used to prepare for him bitter curry, soup, and other dishes, as he desired. When I could not cook for him during those three days a month when women are debarred from cooking, he would get consecrated food from the Kali temple. But that food would invariably upset his stomach. One day he told me, 'You see as you didn't cook for these three days my stomach trouble is aggravated. Why didn't you cook these days?' I said, 'Women are prohibited from cooking for others when they remain unclean for three days." Then he said, 'Who told you that? You will cook for me; there is nothing wrong in it. Please tell me what is impure in your body-the skin or flesh, or bones, or marrow? It is the mind that makes one pure or impure. There is nothing called impurity outside the mind.' Thenceforth I used to cook for him every day."

During the Mother's illness at Koalpara I prepared Sherbet for her, and to be sure that the preparation was satisfactory, I tasted a little before I offered it to her. Although the Mother didn't know of this, a few days later she happened to remark, "Look, my son, it is very good to taste the food before it is given to some one you love." Then I said, "Mother, I also tasted the Sherbet I gave you." She said, "You did well, my son. This is how one should offer food to beloved ones. Haven't you heard that the cowherd boys used to taste the fruits before offering them to Sri Krishna?"

I asked her one day, "Mother, sometimes when I see certain persons on the road, I feel that they are well-known to me. Later, on enquiry, I learn that they are either devotees of the Master or of you. Why do they appear so familiar even when seen suddenly for the first time?" The Mother replied, "The Master used to say, 'Suppose there is a clump of weed; if one pulls at a weed, the whole clump is affected. The weeds are related to one another like the branches of a plant.'"

Another day I asked her, "Mother, all other Incarnations survived their spiritual consorts (Sakti), but why this time did the Master pass away leaving you behind?" The Mother said, "Do you know, my son, that the Master looked upon all in this world as Mother? He left me behind this time for demonstrating that Motherhood to the world."

20: Recorded by Nalinibehari Sarkar

When the topic of Japa and meditation came up, the Mother said, "There should be a regular time for the practice of Japa and meditation. For no one knows when the auspicious moment will come. It comes suddenly—one has no hint of it before hand. Therefore, regularity in spiritual practice should be observed, no matter how busy one may be with worldly matters."

Disciple: The demands of work or illness prevent me from always being regular in my spiritual practice,

Mother: Illness is not within man's control. And if you are really tied down with work, then simply remember God and make salutation to Him.

Disciple: What time should one set aside for Japa and meditation?

Mother: To call upon Him at the conjunction of day and night is the most auspicious. Night disappears and day arrives, or day disappears and night arrives—this is the conjunction of day and night. The mind remains pure at these times.

When asked about the weaknesses of the mind, the Mother said, "Son, it is Nature's law, just as you find the full moon and the new moon. Similarly the mind is possessed of noble thoughts at times and haunted by evil thoughts at other moments."

When the Mother used to go to Baghbazar from Jayrambati, she would ask me to visit Jayrambati occasionally to keep myself abreast of the happenings there, I tried to obey this order as far as practicable. But because of the Mother's absence from Jayrambati I didn't enjoy my visits there and so wrote to the Mother to this effect. On her return to Jayrambati, in the course of a conversation she said. "Oh N-! Listen to what Ranni says," During her last visit to Calcutta, the Mother had retained the service of the female cook and engaged her to assist the eldest aunty wife of Prasanna Kumar. It was summer and the female cook slept with the mosquito net fixed in front of the door of the Mother's old house. Now, she dreamt that the Mother approached her after her bath carrying a flower basket in one hand and a water pot in the other. "Get up, get up from here," she said, rebuking her for lying across the

door. When the female cook finished recounting her dream, the Mother smiled and said, "Listen, my dear, who knows what she is talking about?"

One day in the course of a conversation I said, "Mother, nothing worthwhile can be achieved in worldly life." In reply she said, "Son, the world is a great mire. If one gets into it, he finds it difficult to get free. Even Brahma and Vishnu gasp in it, what to speak of man! Repeat His name. If you repeat His name, He will take you beyond worldliness. Son, can anyone attain liberation unless He helps? Have deep faith in Him. Know the Master to be your refuge, just as parents are to children in this world."

When one day the topic of faith in God was raised, the Mother observed, "Son, does one acquire faith by mere study of books? Too much study creates confusion. Suppose I write to you a letter asking you to bring such and such things for me. How long would you need this letter? As long as you don't know what it says. As soon as you have known the contents of the letter, what would be the need of it any longer? Then what is required of you is to bring me those things. Without doing so, what would be the good of reading the letter day and night?"

One day I told the Mother passionately, "Mother, I come to you so frequently, and I have received your grace, too. But then, why haven't I achieved anything? I feel that I am as I was before."

In reply the Mother said, "My son, suppose you are asleep on a cot and somebody removes you along with the cot to another place. Will you realize immediately on waking that you have been transferred to a new place? Not at all. Only when the drowsiness clears away completely will you realize that you have come to a new place."

Once I had left home to attend a festival at Belur Math, but en route I had got off at Midnapore to attend to some minor work. As I could not catch the evening train, I went back to Calcutta the next day. On reaching Calcutta in the evening, I went to see the Holy Mother. When she saw me, the Mother asked, "Didn't you attend the festival?" "No, Mother, I couldn't attend it," I said, and began narrating my experiences during my journey. On hearing of them, the Mother said, "One should attain his objective somehow or other. You see, my child, you missed seeing so many things. First do the work which you intended to do." Subsequently the Mother said, "Come here tomorrow and partake of the Master's Prasad."

As regards food, the Mother used to say, "First offer to God whatever you are going to eat and then take it as Prasad. This will purify your blood, and purified blood will make the mind pure."

One day, for some reason or other, the Mother became annoyed with her brothers. When I approached her at that time, she told us a few anecdotes regarding the reason for her annoyance. Then she remarked, "My child, they crave for money and money only. They simply keep on saying, 'Give us money, give us money.' Never have they prayed, even mistakenly, for knowledge or devotion. Well, let them have what they seek!"

Once when the Mother was suffering from a dangerous fever at Jayrambati, just prior to her last illness, I was massaging her feet, when she said, "Look, my child, I have been praying for the last few days, but there has been no response. How much I have wept! Even then, nothing happened. At last the Divine Mother Jagaddhatri came today. But Her face resembled my mother's face. Now I shall recover from my illness. Once when I was young, I was travelling to Dakshineswar. On the way I was seized with high fever. I was lying unconscious when I saw a girl with a very black complexion and feet covered with dust enter my room and sit by the bedside. She began to stroke my head. Noticing that the girl's feet were covered with dust, I asked, 'Mother, didn't anybody give you water to wash your feet?' She replied, 'No, Mother, I shall be leaving immediately. I have come to see you. Why do you fear? You will get well.' From the next day I gradually recovered. This time I have suffered very much, my child. Only after much prayer did I see Jagaddhatri today. I am going to be cured this time also. Why fear, my child? If you call upon Him earnestly, He will protect you in all situations."

It was in the month of Kartik (Oct-Nov) 1910, a few days before the Kalipuja, that I visited the Holy Mother for the first time at the earnest request of Sri Chandrakanta Ghosh of Shillong. Arriving at Calcutta, I went to the Udbodhan house in the company of one of my friends who had already received spiritual initiation from the Holy Mother. After waiting for a short time, I met the Holy Mother, when suddenly my friend requested her to grant me spiritual initiation. The Mother replied, "All right, he will have initiation tomorrow." Her reply startled me, for I had not even mentioned anything to her regarding my initiation. Nevertheless, I went there the next day at the appointed hour. I saluted the Holy Mother, and when I was about to offer flowers at her feet, she said, "Not now; I shall tell you when to give

the offerings." My spiritual initiation over, the Mother sat on the floor with her legs stretched out and said, "Now you can offer the flowers." I offered flowers at her feet and said, "I am offering flowers not from a deep sense of devotion, but because Chandrakanta Babu taught me to do so. I only followed what he told me to do. It is Chandrakanta Babu who sent me here."

Smilingly the Holy Mother said, "Chandrakanta has shown you the right path, son," and so saying, she placed her hand on my head.

Another day I went to see the Holy Mother. In the course of conversation I said, "Mother, various worldly troubles as well as my official duties keep me busy. I am therefore unable to devote time to spiritual practices. I do not also find any improvement in the state of my mind." The Mother immediately assured me saying, "Whatever may happen to you now, the Master will have to appear at the last moment of your life to receive you. He himself said this. Can his words fail in your case? Now, do whatever you like.'"

Disciple: Mother, is it true that those who have received spiritual initiation from you will not be born again?

Mother: It is true, they will not come to earth again. Know for certain that there is One behind you.

Disciple: Mother, we have found you, so we are protected.

Mother: Why do you worry, child? The thought of you all comes to my mind very often. I do remember you all very much.

Another time when the Holy Mother was at the Koalpara Math, I said to her, "Mother, I am hardly able to do any spiritual practice."

Mother gave me courage as well as assurance saying, "You need not do anything special. I shall do the needful for you."

Astonished at this, I asked, "Shall I have to do no spiritual practice?"

Mother: None.

Disciple: Will my future progress not depend on my own deeds henceforth?

Mother: No, what will you do? I shall do, whatever is necessary.

I was struck dumb by this unrestricted grace of the Holy Mother. The talk next drifted to the pain in her legs. I asked, Mother, I have heard that you suffer only when certain persons touch your feet."

Another: Yes, son, the touch of some persons makes the body cool; but the touch of some others feels like the sting of a wasp. But I never give expression to this experience.

Now I began to brood whether I belonged to the group of 'wasps'. The Mother, as if she was indwelling my mind, said instantly," Son, you are not one of them."

About a month later during the holidays of the Car Festival, I visited Koalpara once again. On the day of the Car Festival I had the following conversation with the Holy Mother.

Disciple: Mother, my strength and hope spring from the grace I have received from you.

Mother: Why do you worry, child? You have found a place in my mind. Whenever I need anything, your thought comes immediately to my mind. I think, 'There are Indu and others; what's there to worry?' You will not have to do any spiritual discipline. I am doing it for you.

Disciple: Do you do the same for all, who have taken spiritual initiation from you, wherever they be?

Mother: Yes, I do it for all of them.

Disciple: You have so many children (initiated disciples), Do you remember all of them?

Mother: No, I do not remember everyone of them.

Disciple: Then, how can you say that you do spiritual practices, for all?

Mother: I tell beads for all those whose names I can recall. And for those whom I cannot remember, I pray to the Master saying, "Thakur, I have so

many children in various places. I cannot remember the names of many of them. You kindly look after them. Kindly look after their well-being."

21: Recorded by an Anonymous Lady Devotee

After giving me spiritual initiation, the Holy Mother said, "Look, dear, I do not usually give initiation to a young widow. I have given it to you only because you are a noble soul. See that you do not betray me. A spiritual teacher has to suffer for the sins of his disciples. Always repeat the name of the Chosen Ideal like the ever-moving hand of a clock."

Another time when I saw her before leaving for my father-in-law's place, she said, "Don't mix with other people, don't get involved in others' affairs. Say: 'Dwell, O Mind, within yourself; enter no other's home.' The Master was fond of coconut balls. When you go back home, please prepare coconut balls and offer them to him. Increase your service to him as well as your Japa and meditation, and read books about the Master."

One day the Mother and I were alone together; there was none else present. The Mother said, "Look here, don't get too close and intimate with men. You should not do so even with your father or brother; what to speak then of other men?"

She instructed me not to visit frequently the Math or other places where monks lived. She used to say, "You see, you may no doubt be going there with a good heart and with deep devotion, but if your visit affects the minds of the monks, it would cause you harm."

She asked me not to go on pilgrimage frequently or in the company of any and everyone. She told me, "Whenever you have some money in hand, feed some holy men." Pointing towards a woman devotee who was sitting in front of us, the Mother said, "Here is someone who was sorely cheated on her pilgrimage. Going on pilgrimage means courting hazards on the way; be not taken too much with it. Staying in your own home, you can achieve more than you could by wandering. It all depends upon your aptitude."

One day five women-devotees were criticizing another devotee. On hearing this, the Mother remarked, "You must have respect for her. It was she who brought you here first."

I wanted to bring up a child of another family, and asked for the Mother's permission. In reply she pointed to her own wretched condition in having to

bring up Radhu and said, "Don't try that by any means. Do your duty towards everyone, but don't bear love towards anyone except God. Loving others brings much misery."

Learning that I had received spiritual initiation from the Holy Mother, our family preceptor had cursed me. I informed the Holy Mother about this. She wrote in reply, "No curse can do any harm to one who has taken refuge in the Master. Be free from all fear."

An old woman devotee told me one day, "There is no charm in the Math or other such places these days." I reported it to the Mother who sat up startled and said, "If there is any true religion, it can be found only here and in the Math."

One day Nalini-Didi and I were discussing the affairs of a woman devotee. We told the Mother, "We do not feel any kind of disrespect for her." The Mother replied, "That's because she calls upon the Master. To one who calls upon the Master, whoever or whatever that person be, none feels disrespect."

22: Recorded by Prafulla Kumar Ganguli

It was the year 1916. Durga Puja was being celebrated at the Math. The Holy Mother came to the Math on the Saptami-puja day, and was staying in the garden house to the north of the Math campus. On the Ashtami-puja day at about 8 a.m. she came to the Math to witness the worship of Durga. A number of householder devotees, monks, and Brahmacharins, were engaged in dressing vegetables in the hall adjoining the kitchen. On observing them, the Mother remarked, "Well, the boys seem to cut vegetables fairly well." One of the monks, Swami Jagadananda, replied, "The grace of the Divine Mother is our aim, be it through spiritual practices or by cutting vegetables!"

On this day a large number of visitors saluted the Holy Mother. Jogin-Ma, noticing that the Mother was now and then washing her feet, said, "What are you doing Mother? You will certainly catch cold."

The Mother replied, "What shall I say, Jogin? When some people touch my feet, it produces a soothing feeling, but in the case of some others, their touch is like fire on my body. Nothing short of a wash with Ganges water brings me relief."

Later, one day I asked the Holy Mother in the course of a conversation, "Once during the Pujas I heard you say that when some persons touch your feet you feel a terrible pain."

Mother: Yes, my son, it is so. It is like the sting of a wasp, but I do not give expression to my feeling.

Soon after, she cast an affectionate gaze towards us and added, "Well, dear, I do not mean any of you."

I said, " I am full of fear, Mother; for I feel I have not gained much even under your care."

The Mother said, "Why should you fear, son? Know that the Master is ever behind you. I too am with you. Why should you fear when I, your mother, am with you? The Master has assured me, saying, whoever takes refuge in you, I shall take him by the hand during his last moments and lead him along the path.' Wherever you may go, whatever you may do, the Master will have

to come during your last hours to lead you to the Light. God created man's hands and feet, so it is natural that man will use them. The senses will have their sway."

Once when I was offering food to the Master, I noticed a stream of light falling on the offering. Referring to this, I asked the Mother, "Mother, is that experience of mine a mere fantasy, or is it true? If a fantasy, please do something so that I can be free from it."

The Mother thought over it a little and said, "No dear, these are all genuine."

Disciple: Do you know what I see?

Mother: Yes.

Disciple: Does the Master receive the food that I offer to him? Do you, too, receive what I offer to you?

Mother: Yes.

Disciple: How can I understand this?

Mother: Why? Have you not read in the Gita that God receives the fruits, flowers, water, and other things that are offered to Him with devotion?

Surprised at this reply, I said, "Then, are you God?"' On hearing this, the Mother laughed heartily. We too joined her.

23: Recorded by an Anonymous Devotee

It was a day in Chaitra of 1321 B.S. (1915) when I went to see the Holy Mother at the Udbodhan house.

Once I had wanted to take my grandmother on a pilgrimage. But as the time was inauspicious, she refused to start. I referred the matter to the Holy Mother for her guidance. She replied, "Son, some say that a man loses the merits he has already earned, if he visits a pilgrim centre at an inauspicious time. But it is wise to perform all holy acts without much delay."

I could not satisfactorily comprehend her meaning, and so expressed my doubt to her once again. I specifically asked her what I should do in my present circumstances.

Mother: People no doubt say that pilgrimages during inauspicious times are prohibited. One can postpone a holy duty out of considerations of time, but look; death (Kala) takes no notice of time. Since death has no fixed hours, one should perform holy duties as soon as an opportunity comes.

* * *

It was Chaitra 27, 1323 B.S. (1917). I was having a chat with the Holy Mother.

Disciple: Mother, everybody says that one who approaches the Kalpataru (wish-fulfilling tree) has to ask for something. But I wonder, for what should children ask their Mother? A mother gives to every child according to its need. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "A mother serves different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children." Now please tell me which is the correct attitude.

Mother: How much intelligence does a man possess? He is likely to ask for something other than what he really needs. He may even end up creating a monkey in place of Siva. It is wise to take refuge in Him. He will always give you whatever is necessary. However, one should pray for devotion and desirelessness; for such a prayer does no harm.

Disciple: The Master said, "Those who come here will be in their last embodiment." Again, Swamiji said, "None can have liberation without complete renunciation." What, then, will be the fate of householders?

Mother: Yes, what the Master said is true; and what Swamiji said is equally true. But householders need not renounce externally. They will automatically acquire internal renunciation. However, some need formal Sannyasa. Why should you be afraid? Surrender yourself to Him and live. And know that the Master is always behind you.

Another time when one of my friends died prematurely in a hospital in a miserable condition, I wrote a letter to the Holy Mother. I mentioned my friend's pure character and devotion to God and prayed for his liberation. In reply the Holy Mother wrote, "I bless your friend. May his soul be liberated. Let the Master emancipate him from all bonds."

24: Recorded by an Anonymous Lady Devotee

The happiest days of my life were when the Holy Mother was alive. One day when I had gone to see the Mother, she was mixing a quantity of coarse powder of parched paddy in a bowl. She happily put two or three crumbs in her mouth and then distributed the rest in the hands of all the devotees present in the room. I said, "Ah! Mother, you hardly took anything." The Mother replied, if these girls eat, it is the same as my eating."

Another day I went to see her and found that she had an eruption of patches of nettle-rash all over her body.

Mother: What are these, my child? What's the cure?

Disciple: Mother, people say that one gets cured if he rolls two and a half times on a blanket spread on the floor of a cow-shed.

Mother: Ah! The cow-shed and the Ganges are very pure indeed! Perhaps that's why one gets cured.

One day my seven-year old sister accompanied me to see the Mother. A few days earlier, she had gone to Navadvip and there had started wearing a string of beads made of basil wood. Noticing the string on her neck, the Mother was happy and patted her on the back, saying, "Ah! When did she get this ornament?"

On that day I had left at home in Basirhat my two-month old suckling daughter. I had come by the morning train and intended to return by the night train. I was feeling that milk was about to ooze from my breast, and so I shrank in uneasiness. Observing this, the Mother asked, "Why are you behaving this way?" I told her the difficulty.

Mother: Ah, my child, why have you left behind your two-month old daughter? You could have brought her.

Disciple: Mother, I have not brought the baby lest she makes the place dirty.

Mother: What if she does? (Repeatedly to all those present) Ah look! From what a distance she has come leaving her two month old baby at home! And how much she is suffering!

When I asked her for a little earth from the temple of Simhavahini, the Mother told her niece to give it to me and remarked, "She (Simhavahini) is a living goddess." Before taking leave, as I bowed down to her, she said, "Come, come again, my child."

25: Recorded by an Anonymous Lady Devotee

One day I told the Mother, Mother, the day I saw the Master for the first time, there was a lustre radiating from his body. It looked like the glow created by sun's rays falling on a piece of glass." On hearing this, the Mother said, "My child, you have seen correctly. When I used to rub oil on his body, I would occasionally see such a lustre."

Another day the Mother's niece Nalini, being very angry, had fasted the whole day. All attempts of the Mother to induce her to eat failed. At long last the Mother called her and said, "Don't take me to be just your aunt. If I so wish, I can give up this body just now."

While talking about the Master, one day the Mother said to Lalit (Swami Kamaleswarananda), placing her hand on her chest “If ever I attain to the Master, you too will certainly attain to him."

26: Recorded by an Anonymous Devotee

The day before the Jagaddhatri Puja of November 1908, I arrived at the Holy Mother's house at Jayrambati to receive initiation from her. When the news of my arrival reached her, the Mother sent word that she would initiate me the next day. Accordingly I received initiation.

Following the Mother's instruction some of us together visited Kamarpukar and then returned. Unfortunately, during this brief time I had a serious altercation with one Swami over some trifling matter. On our return to Jayrambati, Uncle Varada told the Mother all that had happened.

Elated with joy, I began to sing songs in front of the image of Jagaddhatri. After a while the Mother called me and said, "You have a joyful nature. You will spend your days in such joy. Pass your time joyfully, just as you were doing, by singing songs in front of Mother Jagaddhatri. This monk is of that nature-you should not feel sorry for his words. But you must remember these few things and carry them out in your life. The Master is very compassionate towards you. Therefore you have felt a spontaneous attraction for him from your young days. Know that one has to be careful about these three things: First, a house situated on the bank of a river; any time the river may suddenly destroy the house and sweep it away. Second, a snake; you must be very careful as soon as you see one, for there is no knowing when it will attack and bite you. Third, a monk; you don't realize that one word or thought of his may do harm to a householder. When you see a monk, you should show him respect. You should not slight him with disrespectful retorts." These valuable words of the Mother have remained a part of me all through my life.

27: Recorded by an Anonymous Lady Devotee

One day I went to the Holy Mother's house taking my son Haricharan, who was then in a deranged state of mind. Approaching the Mother, he began to address her contemptuously in the language used for inferiors, saying, "I am hungry, give me food", etc. The Mother gave him some consecrated food to eat. While taking the food he began to throw the leavings here and there. Being annoyed at this, I remarked, "This is a shrine, and the boy is making a mess." Immediately the Mother affectionately said, '"Let him eat the food. After he has finished, you remove the leavings."

I asked the Mother, "Mother, what's the matter with him? As soon as he sees a Brahmana or a cow he bows down." The Mother remarked, "Compassion for living beings has dawned in him."

On the Kojagari full moon day of one year, Haricharan and I fasted and went to the Udbodhan house for offering flowers at the Holy Mother's feet. After the offering, we saluted her. Then, the Mother blessed Haricharan, saying, "May you have good fortune! May you live long!"

The Holy Mother said to me, "I find peace in meeting you all. But I feel sad when I see you, for you have lost your educated son who was maintaining you."

One day I said to the Mother, "Mother, may I have devotion to the holy feet of the Master." The Mother said, "By practising devotional disciplines you can gradually have it." Whenever I visited the Mother in the morning hours, she would feed me with rice after Radhu's noon-meal but before the offerings were made to the Master, saying, "Mourning for your dead son has dried up your heart. You shall take your meal early." I would say, "Our family already suffers from want of food. Should I take my meal before the food has been offered to the Master?" At this the Mother would observe. "You will never suffer from want of food."

One day the Mother said, "I have interviewed many a madcap to find out your lost son. I feel that your son is alive. Sarat (Swami Saradananda) too said that he is alive."

When I asked the Mother if my son would return home, she said, "He will come." After this, the Mother held a bundle of sticks in front of the picture of the Master. Many pieces of torn cloth were firmly wrapped around the sticks. She held the entire thing in front of the Master and said, "Please say correctly whether her son will return or not. If you do not, you will get involved in the sin of killing Brahmanas, women, and cows." In the meantime the sticks within the wrappings had become loose and they rose up. As soon as Mother touched them, they dropped down. The Mother said, "Did you see what happened, my child? It showed that your son will return. You may try this yourself at home," According to her instruction I performed the same ritual and it gave the same result.

One day I escorted my mother to the Holy Mother's house with a new Sari for the Mother. I had asked someone to purchase a Sari, but he could not get a good quality cloth. In presenting the cloth to the Mother, I said, "Mother, this cloth is not good. It's not to my liking." The Mother immediately changed her Sari and eagerly put on the new one, saying, "Look, I have put on your Sari. Don't feel sorry. I shall wear this Sari for bathing in the Ganges."

One day I went to see her at Balaram Babu's residence. On that occasion, I saw a person presenting the Mother with some money, saying, "Mother, a certain person is sick. Please see that he gets cured." The Mother replied, "Take back this money. Whoever is born, dies one day. What can I do?" Some days later we heard that the sick man had expired.

28: Recorded by Jitendra Mohan Chowdhury

In Jayrambati certain devotees asked the Mother, "When we travel by railway train or steamer, how should we do Japa?" The Mother replied, "You should do it mentally." She said further, 'Son, gradually your hands and lips will cease to work and your mind only will repeat the name. The mind will eventually turn into your Guru."

Once in Varanasi the Holy Mother's birthday was being celebrated. On that day Swami Keshavananda's mother was shedding tears on remembering the death of one of her relations. At this the Mother said, "For shame! To weep on this day! It is a day of joy."

On the Rathayatra day at Koalpara, one of my Gurubhais told the Mother, "Mother, my mind is very restless. I can't make it steady by any means." In reply the Mother said, "As a storm blows away clouds, so does His holy name disperse the cloud of worldliness."

On that day I confided to the Mother my mental weaknesses. She said in reply, "Do you think one can get rid of lust altogether? It will be there in some form or other as long as the body lasts. But then, I tell you, it will be reduced to a state comparable to a charmed snake."

The Mother once said, "Why fear? Always remember, there is one person behind you." She further said, "So long as this body (meaning her body) lasts, pass your days in joy."

Once during a conversation the Mother said, "Except for grass and bamboo, everybody will have to come here." Its implication, as I have understood, is that only those who have no substance in them will be excluded, otherwise everybody else will accept the ideas of Sri Ramakrishna. The Mother communicated similar ideas to Swami Keshavananda and Swami Vidyananda also.

A woman devotee asked the Mother, "Mother, many persons perform the worship of Siva. Can we also perform this worship?" In reply the Mother said, "The worship of Durga, Kali, and others can be done with the Mantra I have given you. But if anyone so wishes, he can learn the specific worships and perform them. You needn't do them; they would be a burden for you."

Regarding offerings to be made to Sri Ramakrishna, somebody once said to the Holy Mother, "Mother, I know nothing of the Mantras prescribed for making offerings." At this, the Mother said, "There is no need for so much formality in worship. Everything can be done with the Ishta Mantra."

29: Recorded by Lalitmohan Saha

One day in 1915 I went to see the Holy Mother at the Udbodban house. When I stood up after saluting her, she said, "How firm was the Master's adherence to truth! How far can we follow his example'! The Master used to say, 'Truthfulness alone is the austerity of the Kali Yuga. One attains to God by holding to truth.' "

The following year at Jayrambati the Mother was once discussing a letter from a monastic disciple in which he had expressed his despondency. Suddenly the Mother began to say gravely and emphatically, "How is it, my dear? Is the Master's name a trifle that it will come to nothing? The uttering of his name can never be futile. Those who have come here remembering the Master will certainly have the vision of their Chosen Ideal. Even if one does not have it during his lifetime, he will assuredly have it at least just before his death."

One Sunday in 1918 I suffered from a mental tribulation which made me feel offended with the Master and the Holy Mother and I resolved that I wouldn't visit the Mother any more. But my friends persuaded me to go to the Udbodhan house. There I found a large number of devotees waiting to salute the Mother. They bowed down before her one after another. The Mother didn't speak a word to anyone. But when I made Pranam last of all, the Mother affectionately asked, "Are you keeping well?" I answered emotionally, "Yes, Mother, I am keeping very fine."

At this, the Mother smiled at me and said, "How is it, my child? This is the mind's nature. Simply because of it, should you behave this way?"

Another day, when I was studying law, I made Pranam to her and asked, "Mother, you see, this is the condition of my mind. And besides this, I am going to practise law. What will be my fate?"

The Mother said with assurance, "Why do you fear, my child? It is nothing more than an occupation."

30: Recorded by Swami Maheswarananda

Once on her birthday at Jayrambati, the Mother had been feeling unwell since early morning. She intended to avoid bathing, but lest her attendants should worry on hearing this, she finally decided to take her bath. In the evening, however, she was found running a high temperature. When I went to see her, she said, "My child, obey the dictates of the mind first. The mind is the first Guru. Just see, this morning as I woke up it occurred to me 'that I should not bathe today, for I was not feeling well. Nevertheless considering various factors, I finally took my bath. And now I am suffering."

In another context the Mother remarked, one day, "The Master used to say, quoting a proverb: 'Eat warm food and lie on a soft bed.' "

One day at the Koalpara monastery, as a distinguished devotee went to salute the Mother, he said to me, "Since touching her feet in salutation causes much suffering to the Mother, we should rather avoid it." The Mother heard this and said, "No, my child, we are here for this purpose only. If we do not accept others' sins and sorrows and digest them, who else will? Who else will bear the responsibility for sinners and sufferers? When some noble devotee touches my feet, I feel no pain. But there are persons whose touch brings an acute burning sensation in my feet. Of course, my child, you will salute me by touching my feet.'

31: Recorded by Priyabala Devi

On 12 Pous (December) 1916

I first bowed down at the lotus feet of the Holy Mother and was blessed with initiation by her. As I climbed the stairs to the first floor of the Mother's house along with a sister disciple, I was trembling in excitement. Yogin-Ma embraced me and escorted me to the Mother, saying, "Look Mother! Here is another daughter of yours—how her eyes and face look!" The Mother, who was pealing fruits at the time, said, "Yes, dear, I know her. She is Rama's daughter." I was surprised at this and wondered how the Mother had come to know about me.

The Mother called me to the shrine room and made rile sit on an asana by her side. When my sister disciple invited me to go for a bath in the Ganges, the Mother remarked, "She does not need to have a bath in the Ganges." She sprinkled Ganges water on my body and then gave me initiation. After telling me a word of the Mantra she remarked, "The Master left for me this part of the Mantra." When I was about to offer flowers and leaves at her feet, the Mother said, "Put the basil and Vilva leaves in my hands but offer the flowers at my feet."

One day while speaking with the Mother, the sister disciple mentioned above said about me, "It will be nice if she is admitted into Nivedita's boarding school." The Mother replied, "No, she need not stay there, but it would be fine if she could stay with me." But I never had the good fortune for this to happen.

One day I asked the Mother, "What shall I do for my spiritual progress? I know nothing at all." The Mother said, "What else shall you do? Do what you are doing now. Repeat His name everyday in the morning and the evening."

On hearing from a woman devotee that widows in our part of the country are very austere regarding their food, etc., the Mother said to me, "In the night you should take chapatis and such other things after offering them to the Master. One should observe the local customs."

32: Recorded by Sarayubala Sen

One morning as the Holy Mother and Golap-Ma were getting ready to go for a bath in the Ganges, Golap-Ma said, "Mother, please rub oil on your body," The Mother said, "No, I won't use oil." When Golap-Ma continued to urge her, the Mother said, "One should not bathe in the Ganges with oil on one's body. If I use oil, all others will use it."

One day a certain woman came to the Mother with a repentant heart and said, "Mother, what is the way out for us'?" The Mother became a little annoyed at this and said, "You bear children every year; you haven't even a little self-control. What is the good of coming to me and saying, 'What is the way out?' ¬

After the Holy Mother's return from Rameswar, I asked her one day, "Mother, won't you please tell us what you saw?" The Mother said, "Many people came to see me. The women there are fairly educated. They asked me to make a speech. I told them I cannot make speeches. Had Gaurdasi come, she could have given a talk.'"

One day the Mother remarked, "A great soul is unique. He is of a kind by himself. Gaurdasi is one such soul."

Another day I found the Mother putting an amulet on Radhu for the cure of her illness and keeping aside some money for the guardian deity, I asked, "Mother, why are you doing this? Everything happens by your will." The Mother replied, "During one's illness if one promises an offering to the guardian deity, one becomes free of danger. Besides, everybody should be given what is his due."

Once Gauri-Ma was lying seriously ill with smallpox in the house of a devotee at Maniktala. The devotee's mother and others nursed her at the risk of their own lives. On hearing this, the Holy Mother said, 'The mother of A….. will be liberated in this very birth. Not only she, but even anybody who had trimmed the wick of the lamp during Gaurdasi's illness will be liberated."

Section III: Translated by others

Part 1: Recorded by Pravrajika Bharatiprana

UDBODHAN:

When I met the Holy Mother for the first time, I was a student of Sister Nivedita's school, at 17, Bosepara lane. One day after the school, Sister Sudhira took four or five of us to the Holy Mother's house. The Mother was sitting in the shrine room. Sister Kusum was reading some book. When we bowed down to her, the Mother said, "Sit down, my dear girl." And she said to Sister Sudhira, "Are you well, my dear? Is your school over just now? Do these girls study in your school?"

Sister Sudhira: Yes Mother, these girls study in our school.

Mother: They are good girls. (Indicating me), Where does, this girl come from? She seems to be a very good girl.

Sister Sudhira: She is of Brahmana parentage. Her house is nearby only.

After this conversation, the Holy Mother said, "Kusum, you read. These people will listen." Reading began. I think the book was 'Krishna Charita'. Hearing the description of Sri Krishna drinking all the curds and milk through various stratagems, the Holy Mother and all others began to laugh very much. She said, "What a mischievous boy!" Soon after, our vehicle arrived. The Mother enquired, 'Will you go just now? Could you not stay a little longer?" Hearing Sister Sudhira's reply, she said, "Then come in the morning, my dear." After receiving Prasad, we bowed down to the Holy Mother and took leave of her. She said "Come, my dear, come again."

Another evening Sister Sudhira took me to the Holy Mother's house. The Mother was lying on a mat spread on a plain cot. Seeing us, she said, "Sit down, my dear." We made Pranam and sat down.

Mother: Is your school over? What is the time now?

Sister Sudhira: Today our school was over in the morning itself. Now it is half past three. And so I came, bringing them with me.

Mother: You have done well.

Later the topic of our conversation turned to a girl. The Holy Mother said, "Just see, my dear. She will not go to her father-in-law's place. She has come to me. She does not like the son-in-law because he is dark. Should she reject him simply because he is dark? He is her husband. What kind of girls these are, I do not know. And I hear that his nature is not good. On that account also she does not wish to go. Even if it were so, he has not" neglected her. All said and done, he is her husband. I do not know, my dear, what kind of girls these are! If people come to know of this, what will they think? Let her do as she pleases." Saying this, she went to wash her clothes. At the time of taking leave, we made Pranam and said, "Mother, we are going." She corrected me, saying, "You should not say 'I am going'. You should say' I shall come'. Come again when you get time, dear."

One Saturday evening Sister Sudhira took a few of us to Dakshineswar and on the way back we went to the Holy Mother's house. The Mother was then lying on her cot. Seeing us, Yogin-Ma said, "Where are you coming from at this time of night?" The Mother enquired, “Who has come?" "It is Sudhira,” replied Yogin-Ma. Hearing that, the Holy Mother sat up. All of us made Pranam to her and sat down.

Mother: Where are you coming from at this time of night?

Sister Sudhira: I took these girls to Dakshineswar. After seeing Arati, as we were returning, it was dark. I thought, having come so close, should I just go away? And so I came over here.

"You have done well," said the Mother and lay down again. Sister Sudhira began shampooing her feet. I stood nearby fanning the Mother. Sister Sudhira was speaking with her about Dakshineswar.

Mother: You have seen the Nahabat. Have you not? I used to stay in the lower room of that Nahabat. Under the stairs I cooked.

Sister Sudhira: Yes, Mother, I know that. Even now, the stairs on the front side are walled over with matting. Under the stairs there is a hearth. And the

baskets of the fisherwomen are left there in that same verandah of yours. I told these girls about you, how you stayed in that room. Well, Mother, how could you live in that room? Did you not have problems?

Mother: The problem was only regarding the morning ablutions and bath. The want of proper toilet arrangements was another. It affected my health. And those fisherwomen were my companions. They came to bathe in the Ganga, and keeping their baskets in the verandah, would get into the water. How much they used to chat with me! And at the time of going, they would pick up their baskets and leave. I used to hear the fishermen sing while catching fish at night. How many devotees used to come to the Master! How much singing! I used to hear it all and think, 'Were I one among those devotees, I too could have stayed very near the Master like them and how much more could I have listened to!' Yogin and Golap know everything. They would come to me and sometimes stay with me.

The Holy Mother looked at Yogin-Ma and said, "How blissful it was then, Yogin!" Saying this, she became a little absent-minded. Yogin-Ma now remarked, "What an intense bliss it was—can it be described in words? The soul is thrilled to think of it even today." The Holy Mother turned to us and said, "It is night. Won't they at home scold you for being late?"

Sister Sudhira: Yes, they will get a little scolding today. Their people at home are quite angry with the folk here. If they hear that these girls have been to this place, they will bite their heads off.

Mother: That is so, my dear. Poor children, how much scolding they will get! How many kinds of people there are—who can say? For those who live in society, there is no end to their fear. Dear ones, you take leave now. Ah! How much scolding they will get!

Sister Sudhira: If they cannot endure a little, what are they good for? By your blessing they will have nothing to fear.

Mother: By the grace of the Master everything will become easy. If they scold, do not say anything in return. In the world so many kinds of people are there. We have to put up with all of them. The Master used to say: sa ,sa, sa meaning, he who 'endures' alone will live.

For our sake she folded her hands before the Master and said, "Lord, give us protection." We bowed down to her and took leave.

During the holidays, one day at noon, Sister Sudhira and three of us went to the Holy Mother's house. The Mother saw us and said, "Sit in the shrine. I shall come after making the offering to the Master." A little later, when she returned, we bowed down to her. After enquiring about our welfare, she asked, "That day, did they scold you at home?" "Not much," we replied. "We did not even feel it."

At the end of the meal the Holy Mother gave cooked Prasada to Sister Sudhira. Among us two were widows. Seeing that they were hesitating to take it, the Mother said, "You eat, my dear, there is no objection to taking Prasada."

The Holy Mother rested a little thereafter, asking us to lie down on the floor, spreading a mat. In the evening the Mother gave us some Prasada, and sat in the verandah, talking with Sister Sudhira. One young lady handed over a picture of Gopal in a lace knitting to the Holy Mother, made Pranam and sat down. The Mother looked at it and said, "My dear, did you make this?" "Yes, Mother," replied the young lady. "Ah, it is well done. What a beautiful expression in the face! See how well she has done!" remarked the Mother. Saying so, the Holy Mother showed it to all of us and continued, "It is well done, is it not?" We all agreed. She looked at the picture again, touched it to her head and asked it to be hung up. Later she enquired after the welfare of the lady's family and gave Prasada to her.

The Holy Mother showed the lace-work to Golap-Ma as soon as she came and said, "See how beautiful it is!" Pointing to the lady, she explained, "This young lady has done it." Golap-Ma looked at it and said, "Everything is quite well done. Only the left arm has become a little too thick." We began to laugh. The Mother also laughed and said, "Golap has come and showed up the blemish. Their taste is different, my dear. Golap is the master of many arts and is therefore critical. Her work is always neat. Besides she has many kinds of skills. All the personal requirements of the Master used to be made by her. She makes all kinds of Things—mosquito curtains, pillows, pillow cases etc. She is never idle."

A little before dusk the lady made Pranam to the Holy Mother and was taking her leave. The Mother said, "Come again, my dear." Yogin-Ma came

and bowed down to the Holy Mother and sat. After a little conversation the Holy Mother showed her also the picture and said, "See how beautifully it is done! What a beautiful expression in the face!" "Well done indeed! Who has done it? It has come out quite excellently!" exclaimed Yogin-Ma. The Holy Mother told her about the lady and said, "Golap says that the left hand is a little stout." Yogin-Ma replied, "O, don't mind her words."

When it was dusk the Holy Mother made Pranam, saying, "Haribol, Haribol, Gurudev, Guru's grace" etc., and bowed down in the direction of the Ganges. She spread her seat in the room and sat down, took a little Ganges water and started doing her Japa. The Arati now started. The room was full of people, of whom many were doing Japa. What a wonderful sight!

On the day of Akshay Tritiya two of my friends took initiation. Unluckily, I could not have it at that time, as I was not then in Calcutta. A little after this, one evening, I went with Sister Sudhira to the Holy Mother's house. The Mother was to have gone to her village but the journey had been put off.

The Holy Mother replied to some questions put by Sister Sudhira and then said, "My youngest sister-in-law has become quite abnormal. She will be better as soon as she goes to the village. And there is Radhu's marriage. Because of all this, I have to go soon. Everything was fixed up for my journey that day. But it was postponed, as the day was not quite auspicious." After Arati, the Holy Mother lay down a little. Sister Sudhira was massaging her feet. The Mother said, "Press a little harder, my dear. Tomorrow is full moon day, and so the rheumatism in the leg is aggravated. Just see, this disease has taken such a hold that there is no sign of its abatement. It started quite long ago, when I was still staying at Dakshineswar."

Gaining a little relief through the massage, the Holy Mother fell into a nap. Our vehicle arrived. We made Pranam to the Master and were leaving, when the Holy Mother woke up and said, "Are you going? Come again." Yogin-Ma told her about my initiation. "Come tomorrow morning," she replied. Next day morning when I reached the Holy Mother's house, she had finished the Master's worship and was getting ready to go for her bath in the Ganges. Seeing me, she said, "Come, my dear, I shall initiate you quickly and then go for bath." After the initiation was over she said, "Offer these flowers at my feet" I was wondering what I should say while offering. The Holy Mother gave me some flowers and continued, "'Whatever that is mine, I offer unto you' —saying this, offer these flowers at my feet." I complied. Showing me

the Master's picture, she said, "He is your all in all. Call upon Him and everything will be yours."

I applied oil upon her feet at her bidding. After the Mother finished her bath, Sister Sudhira said that we should now be leaving. "How can you go away now, my dear?" objected the Holy Mother. "Have your Prasad and go in the evening." When Yogin-Ma came upstairs, the Holy Mother told her, "These people want to go home:' Yogin-Ma said: "They should take Prasad, and then go. I have just told the cook about their food."

Yogin-Ma was going home. She bowed down at the Holy Mother's feet. The Holy Mother placed her hand on her head and blessed her and said, 'It is quite late in the day. Why don't you take your food here? To cook again after reaching home will be difficult:' "No, Mother. My mother is there. She would have made all arrangements. I shall have only just to cook," replied Yogin-Ma. So the Holy Mother hurried her on the journey, saying, "Then don't make any more delay, my dear. The sun is hot and you have to go quite a long distance."

After that, Lalit Babu's wife came, made Pranam and sat down. Her daughters had passed away recently and she was grief-stricken. The Holy Mother consoled her in various ways. Said she, "Ah, all the three passed away! Could not at least one survive? Added to that, Lalit is ill. May he recover by the Master's grace. It will be a great solace if Lalit is saved." She gave her Prasad and continued, "Eat, my dear. How thin you have become!" Taking leave, Sister Sudhira now said to the Holy Mother, "After how many days hence could I hope to have your Darshan?" "I shall return soon," replied the Holy Mother. "Why don't you come to attend Radhu's marriage?" Sister Sudhira did not say anything in reply to this, but said, "For the present I shall take leave, Mother." The Holy Mother gave her blessings and said, "Come again after my return."

After the Holy Mother came back from the village, Sister Sudhira and I went to the Mother's house one evening and paid our respects to her. Sister Sudhira remarked, "Mother, you have become very dark and lean." "Our village is in open fields, you know," the Mother replied, "and so the complexion becomes dark. In addition, I had to work hard too."

Sister Nivedita now came in, bowed down to the Holy Mother and took her seat. The Holy Mother enquired after her welfare, and gave her a woollen

fan made by herself, saying, "I kept this for you." The Sister was very happy to receive it. She put it on her head, touched it to her heart and said, "How beautiful, how wonderful!"

She showed it to us and said, "Just see how beautifully it is made!" The Holy Mother said appreciatively, "Do you notice her happiness upon receiving some small present! Ah, what simple faith! As if she were a Goddess! How much devotion she has for Naren! Because he is born in this country, she left her all and has come to do his work with her heart and soul. What a devotion to the Guru! What love for this country!"

The Sister was going to Darjeeling. She told the Holy Mother about it. When Radhu came in, the Holy Mother told her, "Radhu, bow down to your sisters." Sister Sudhira protested, saying, "No, no; let her not do so. Why should she salute us?" But the Holy Mother persisted, saying, "You are all her elder sisters. Should she not salute you?" One Brahmacharin now came in and informed the Holy Mother of men devotees waiting to make Pranam to her. "Let them come," she said and sat covering herself with a shawl. Some time later we returned home after receiving the Mother's blessing.

One day Sister Nivedita told us that the Holy Mother would visit our School, and that we should all be full of joy on the occasion. The Holy Mother's carriage arrived only in the evening instead of in the morning. Radhu, Golap Ma and others were with her. As soon as she got down from the vehicle, Sister Nivedita made Sashtanga Pranam (full prostration) to her and led her to the prayer hall. She gave us all flowers to be offered at the Holy Mother's feet. As the girls offered flowers, Sister Nivedita introduced them one by one to the Holy Mother. The Mother asked the girls to sing a little. They did so and recited a poem. The Holy Mother listened to it and appreciated the poem. Then she directed some Prasad to be given to us. A little later Sister Nivedita took her around and showed her the whole house, the handicrafts of the girls, etc. On seeing all that, the Mother was much pleased and remarked, "The girls have indeed got good training." Later on Sister Nivedita took the Mother to her own room for rest.

At the time of Sister Nivedita's passing away, Sister Sudhira too was quite ill. How much the Holy Mother worried for her sake! She would cry, saying, "Oh-Master, has Sudhira got to go? How much work she has still to do!"

To the 'aunt at Syampukur' the Holy Mother said, "Could you bring me news of Sister Sudhira, my dear? Ah, how ill she is!" When she agreed, the Holy Mother gave her the Master's Charanamrita, pomegranate etc., and said, “Give these to her, and let me know how she is. I am offering Tulasi leaves to the Master for her sake."

After Sister Sudhira recovered her health, she, I and Sister Christine went to the Holy Mother's house one evening. After Arati we made Pranam to her and seated ourselves before her. "Have you got well, my dear'?" enquired the Holy Mother. Sister Sudhira replied that she was much better but that she had still to be careful. "I was greatly worried about you," said the Holy Mother. "You have, however, recovered by the Master's grace. Just now Nivedita passed away and you fell ill right after that-hearing it I wondered, if Sudhira too goes, who will run the school? (Referring to Sister Christine) Ah, they were together all the time. Now how much more difficult it will be for her to be alone! Even our hearts are afflicted by her demise, what then to speak of your grief! What a personality she was! How many people weep for her today!" Speaking thus, the Holy Mother began to weep. Later she asked Sister Christine many questions about the school.

Sister Sudhira was to go to Kasi for a change. I was to accompany her. Hearing that from us, the Holy Mother made detailed enquiries about our plan and said, "Start soon, my dear. The body is to be cared for, is it not?"

It was many days later that I went to the Holy Mother next. Mrs— was with me. As Sister Sudhira was not with me that time, I was greatly worried whether the Holy Mother would be able to recognise me. We went to the shrine and saw that the Mother had got up after finishing the Puja. Seeing me, she said, "Oh! my dear, you have come at last? It is many days since your last visit is it not? How much I thought of you! Where were you?" As I made Pranam she put her hand on my head and blessed me and enquired about Sister Sudhira. I said that she had come to Calcutta and that I came with her. My soul was filled with bliss at the thought that the Holy Mother could recognise me.

That day there was an invitation from Balaram Babu's house and all were going there. Radhu was not well. So the Holy Mother said referring to me, "She won't go anyhow, not being an invitee Radhu and she shall remain here."

The vehicle to take the Holy Mother arrived. Before leaving the Mother told us, "You two amuse yourselves. I shall return quickly." Then she said to Radhu, "Play with your sister, my dear. I shall return shortly."

The Holy Mother came back after four. I, together with others, was to go by the same vehicle. The Mother hastily gave me some Prasad and said, "Ah, my dear, we have just arrived and you are going away immediately. What can be done? You have come with them, and it is proper for you to return with them."

Radhu: Why not let the sister stay?

Mother: How can she stay, my dear?

Radhu: No, let her stay. Let the others go away.

Mother: She (Radhu) is senseless, for sure. If she stays, how can the others go? No, my dear. You get ready quickly; they are calling you from below.

I bowed down to the Holy Mother and took leave of her. She blessed me and said, "How many days you have to stay like this, the Master alone knows. Come again, my dear." She came with me upto the stairs. What a deep compassion of hers I experienced that day, I cannot describe in words. She gave me much instruction, saying, "Do this, do that etc."

VARANASI: 1912

During the holidays of the month of Paush (February), Sister Sudhira wished to be with the Holy-Mother and went to Kasi, taking along a few of us with her. When we met the Holy Mother, after some talk, she enquired about Yogin-Ma and said, "Ah, my dear, Yogin could not come. She was quite ill. The Master and the Divine Mother saved her. I was much worried over Yogin." After a little conversation, Sister Sudhira and others went to see the house hired for our stay.

The Holy Mother fell asleep a little. The house was almost silent with everybody resting. In that silence a song was heard from the verandah:

Where has my Mother gone?

For many days have I not seen you; Mother, take me in the lap.

What sort of a Mother art Thou, so stony-hearted towards the child!

Grant Thy vision, Mother, and make me weep no more.

The song was sung in such a gentle tone that I felt as though some one was weeping at quite a distance. Suddenly the Holy Mother woke up and said, "Who is singing? Let us go, my dear, to the verandah and see." We went and what I saw struck me dumb with astonishment. One girl was singing the song and her chest was bathed in tears as she sang. As the Holy Mother sat there, the girl bowed down to her and said, "Mother, my heart's desire of many days is fulfilled today. I cannot express the joy that is flooding me today, Mother." The Holy Mother blessed her and asked her about herself.

Girl: I am only a beggar girl, Mother.

Mother: Where do you stay?

Girl: I stay at the gate of Annapurna, near the Behari Baba's temple at the Dasasvamedh Ghat.

Mother: You are well off by taking alms, I hope?

Girl: By your blessing everything goes on well, Mother. There is no worry about daily needs. By the grace of Annapurna, no one has to go without food here, Mother. I am worried about how to get a little Bhakti.

Mother: That will certainly come about, my dear. You stay in such a sacred place. Here Lord Viswanath and Mother Annapurna are reigning actually. By Their grace everything will come about.

The Holy Mother asked her to sing another song. She began to sing:

Mother, may thou be pleased to keep me as a child!
Let me not grow, leaving behind the beauty of childhood.
A beautiful simple soul, unaware of honour and infamy;
It does not know cruelty, nor censure nor shame nor contempt.

Mother: What a beautiful song!

Girl: I had a great desire for many days to see you. Hearing that you are here, I often think of coming but feel afraid that someone would object.

Mother: None will say anything. Come whenever you like.

The Holy Mother asked Prasad to be given to her. After receiving Prasad the girl was taking leave. The Holy Mother told her, "Come again, my dear." Later she told us, "The girl has great devotion."

During the few days we were in Kasi, we used to go to the Holy Mother everyday, morning and evening. One evening, when we went there the Mother was going to the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama to attend a Bhagavata discourse. Seeing us, she said, "We are going to hear the Bhagavata at the Math. Some Pandit recites. Will you come? Why not you come with us?" We went with her. The talk lasted two hours. After the talk was over, the Holy Mother gave a Rupee, bowed down and returned. In the course of a conversation she said, "Ah, what a wonderful recitation! The pandit has done very well."

One day after dusk Sister Sudhira and I were sitting near the Holy Mother. The Mother then said, "Anyone who has once called on the Master, with sincere faith and devotion has nothing more to fear. As one calls on Him, by His grace one gets Prema-bhakti, loving devotion. This love is to be cherished in utmost privacy, my dear. The Gopis of Vraja had this Prema-bhakti. They did not know anything except Krishna. It is said in Nilakantha's song: 'This treasure of Prema must be preserved with the greatest effort.' "Saying this, the Holy Mother sang the song. In what a sweet voice did she sing that day! It is even today resounding in my ears. At the end of the song, she said, "Ah, how excellent is this song of Nilakantha! The Master liked it immensely. While the Master was at Dakshineswar, Nilakantha would come to him now and then and sing songs. How blissful it was! How many kinds of people came to him! It was as if a mart of joy was set up at Dakshineswar."

I went to the Holy Mother's house another day. The Mother was sitting in the verandah and talking with two ladies. The beggar girl mentioned earlier came and bowed down to the Holy Mother. In her hand was a pear. She offered it to the Mother and said, "Mother, I got it as alms today, and so I have brought it for you. But Mother, I cannot muster the courage to offer it

to you." "You have done well," assured the Holy Mother. "Ah! Give it to me, my dear." Saying this, she took the pear, touched it to her head and said, "The things given as alms are very pure. The Master loved them very much. It is quite a good pear too. I shall eat it now." The girl was deeply touched and said, "I am only a beggar girl, what compassion are you bestowing upon me!" Tears trickled down her cheeks as she said this. The Holy Mother continued, "Your songs are so sweet. Now do sing a song for me." The girl sang:

Gopal, I shall deck you now.
Do dance thus and thus, wheel and turn about.
I shall fix up your anklets, my dear,
They would sound well jingling.
A golden cloth I shall wrap around your waist.
Gopal, my dear, I shall feed you,
And give you two pairs of golden wristlets.

Concluding the song, she added, "Mother, if this song is sung, the Behari Baba Sadhu of Dasasvamedha Ghat would keep dancing just like Gopal. His nature is exactly like that of a boy."

The Holy Mother said, "Quite a good song, won't you sing another?" She sang another song. The Holy Mother asked Prasad to be given her. Taking the Prasad, she bowed down to the Mother saying, "I shall take leave for the day, Mother."

"Come again, my dear, come whenever you like," said the Holy Mother.

One day at about three, the Holy Mother picked us up on her way to the Old Women's Ashrama. When we got down there, a young woman came and took the Holy Mother upstairs. All the old ladies began to offer flowers at her feet and bow down at her feet.

Mother: What is this? These are all dwellers of Kasi. Why then do they make Pranam?

Young Woman: Should they not, Mother? They are all maintained by your food.

Mother: My dear, Lord Viswanath and Mother Annapurna are there. I take it that you are the care-taker of these people?

Young Women: Yes, mother, as you make me do.

Mother: Ah, that is good. If these helpless old ladies are served, Narayana's service is done. Ah, what wonderful work these children are doing!

After that the Holy Mother made their acquaintance, visited their rooms and returned.

One day after dusk we returned from Sarnath and went to the Holy Mother's house. The Mother was lying down. Radhu was lying by her side. Hearing the description of Sarnath, she asked, "Mother, will you go once to see the place?" "How can that be, my dear?" responded the Holy Mother. "Do I have legs to go round and see? Just look, my dear, I cannot go and have Darshan of Viswanath even. Seeing all these people go, I too get a desire to go and see Lord Viswanath. But I cannot walk. How to go? I cannot do anything. When my legs were in good condition, I walked from my village to Dakshineswar. What a distance could I walk then! After the Master's passing away, I went to Vrindaban. I used to walk from place to place and have Darshan."

Another day one woman and her daughter of ten or eleven years were seated near the Holy Mother. The woman was very poor.

Mother: Where is your husband?

Women: He became a Bairagi some time back. He went away when this girl was quite young.

Mother: All these days how have you managed without work?

Woman: I did some work and managed with whatever was got. Now this won't do any longer, Mother, I am in great difficulty. If only you could tell them and arrange something. Mother!

Mother: I could put in a word. But they collect by begging. How many people they help that way! They will do as they think fit, surely.

The Holy Mother gave her a rupee and a cloth and said, "Take food here today." The Mother was sitting on the roof. Below, the cooking was going on. The woman said, "Mother, the girl says 'what a fine smell of cooking is coming!'" The Holy Mother said reprovingly. "What is this? Should one say such things? The food is intended for the Master's offering." At the time of taking Prasad the Holy Mother told the cook to serve a large helping of fish curry etc, to the girl. After food, the woman said, "I had a hearty meal, Mother; the girl does not want even to get up." "That's good," said the Holy Mother. "Now that the meal is over, go below and rinse your mouth." When the woman went away the Holy Mother said, "What poverty! What greed! The girl ate and ate until she was about to vomit! Such a grown up girl and no sense at all. Nothing will benefit these people. Prosperity will never attend on them."

When they returned upstairs, the Holy Mother gave them betel rolls and bade them goodbye. After they had gone away, the Mother lay down on the cot and was chatting with us. "So many kinds of people live in Kasi," she said. "How many of them come to me and say 'Please tell your children to help us a little.' What could I reply? You just see, they built a home for helpless old women. How hard they have worked for it, and how much service they are doing! A hospital for the sick is there. Their activities for the relief of the poor seem endless. How much the poor children toil! It is all His will, my dear. What He is making us do from where, He alone knows."

One evening when I went to the Holy Mother, she was sitting in the verandah talking with a few widows. One among them was wearing an ochre cloth. She sang a song for the Holy Mother

'Just you wait, Oh Java, you the beauty of the forest!
Flower of the wild you are, blossoming in the wild.
When I see you on the bosom of Siva,
I think I see the crimson feet of the Divine Mother,' etc.

Golap-Ma: Ah, what an excellent song! Do sing another.

The girl sang another song.

Mother: Have you seen the Sevashrama?

Sister Sudhira: No, we have not seen.

Mother: Then go with Golap and see.

Another evening the Holy Mother was talking of Devavrata Maharaj and Sachin. They went away suddenly because of the Government's objection to their presence on account of their political antecedents.

Mother: Ah, Devavrata went away today. The Company (the East India Company, the old name for the British Govt. in India) offered some help in connection with the acquisition of the land proximate to the Sevashrama. But they raised objection against the stay of these two. So Rakhal told them to go away. Do you know, my dear, they are innocent, but yet a detective is ever after them. Ah, the boys did not even take food before going.

Sister Sudhira: Brother (i.e. Devavrata Maharaj) and Sachin had food with us.

Mother: Ah, my dear, did they have their meal? That is good. I was worried about it.

Sister Sudhira: Wherever brother goes, they keep track of him. So he says 'my father-in-law's people have come. I will go, have a look and return.'

Mother: Father-in-law's people indeed! It was very long ago that they caught him in connection with the Swadeshi Movement. Still they are on his trail. Just see, the whole day my mind was troubled thinking that the boys had had no food. I am, however, at peace now, after learning that they took food at your place.

Part 2: Recorded by Pravrajika Bharatiprana

UOBOOHAN, CALCUTTA

It was the day of the Jagaddhatri Puja. Devotees had been arriving from early morning. The Puja was at Yogin-Ma's house. She came in the morning and went back, asking the Holy Mother to go to her house. One devotee came, bowed down, and said, "Mother, be so gracious as to sanctify the house of your worthless son by bestowing in it the dust of your lotus feet." "Well, let me see if I can go in the evening. You come again in the evening. I shall come, if I find it convenient," responded the Holy Mother.

That noon the Holy Mother and some of us went to Yogin-Ma's house, had the Darshan of the Deity and returned. The Holy Mother fasted the whole day, as there was Puja in her house. At about four when the Puja was over, she took a little Prasad and rested.

That devotee came to take the Holy Mother. The Holy Mother heard of it and said, 'He pressed me so much in the morning. I'll go for a little while.' Their home was not far away. It was in the Rajvallabhpara. As the Holy Mother got down from the vehicle, they washed her feet and preserved the water. The house was small, and dilapidated. We made Pranam to the Deity and went inside. They spread a seat for the Holy Mother to sit. She spread her seat near the door and said, "I'll rather sit here."

One old lady began to talk with the Mother.

Old Lady: Mother, please bless my boy. He had a great desire to perform the Puja, but we have no house or other facilities. Yet somehow the Mother's worship has been done. He alone did everything.

Mother: Ah! He did well. When Mother has come, then house and everything else will come. Your boy is very good. He has much devotion.

A little later Prasad was brought and the Holy Mother put a little in her mouth and got up to leave. She put a rupee before the Deity, made Pranam and said, "The image is very beautiful. Mother's expression is wonderful; this is because the worship has been done by a devotee!" Returning home, Nalini began, "What a house, oh Mother! There is no place to sit even. Oh

dear, how could he perform the worship in that house." The Holy Mother said, "What can he do? He is a poor man, but very devoted. Ah, he brought the Divine Mother. Out of compassion the Divine Mother came to his house."

A letter came from Jayrambati saying that the worship of Mother Jagaddhatri concluded successfully and that many people had Prasad. The Holy Mother said, "By the grace of the Mother, the worship was concluded auspiciously. I was much worried about how they would manage. Jnan was there, so the Mother's worship was done well."

One day after dusk the Holy Mother was sitting near Radhu, giving her fomentation. Radhu had a pain under her ribs. Now one woman devotee made Pranam to the Mother and sat down.

Mother: Come my dear. How are you?

Devotee: I am well, Mother. What has happened to Radhu?

Mother: Radhu has the same sickness. Just see, the child is exhausted. The wretched pain-wherefrom has it come? So many doctors are attending, and I am making vows of offerings to so many Deities, but all to no effect.

Devotee: She will get well, Mother, why fear?

Mother: Do bless her.

She took Prasad and left after a little chat. I asked the Holy Mother, "How surprising, Mother? How she has changed! It is beyond my understanding."

Mother: How can you understand, my dear? When sin enters, is there a way to protect oneself? She is forbidden to come to my place. And so she comes stealthily at night.

Disciple: I saw her earlier staying with you.

Mother: Yes, earlier she used to be with me in day time and go home at night. How much she served Radhu! Her star turned a little and she has become like this. Coming to me is completely stopped. She has done nothing in this birth, all flow from the past birth only.

Another evening the Holy Mother was sitting in the room. The Master's disciple Puma Babu was quite ill. There was no hope of his survival. His mother came. Seeing her come, the Holy Mother said, "There she comes. How she troubles me coming every day, saying, 'Mother, please bless. Please make Puma well'. I know that Purna will not survive. Still for their sake I have to say, 'He will get well.'" Purna Babu's mother came, made Pranam to Holy Mother and said, 'Mother, make your child well,' and began to weep.

Mother: What can I do, mother? Appeal to the Master. He will set everything right.

Purna Babu's Mother: You can, if only you wish, Mother.

Mother: I for my part can only let the Master know of it. Later the Holy Mother told us, "The Master had said, 'If you marry him off, he will not live long'. She did not listen then. In haste, lest he should become a Sannyasin, she got him married."

A few days later, the Holy Mother, Yogin-Ma, etc., were lying down after evening Arati. The Mother was drowsing a little. Suddenly she got up, saying, "Is Purna dead, Yogin?" Yogin-Ma was amazed to hear this query and asked, "Who told you this, Mother?" The Holy Mother replied, "I was sleeping. Suddenly I heard some one saying 'Purna is dead'. Yogin-Ma confessed then, "Yes, Mother. Today evening that calamity occurred. I did not tell you, Mother." That night the Holy Mother would speak only of Purna Babu. She was quite sorry for his sake.

In Dakshineswar at the time of the Master's illness, the Holy Mother was serving him. Later the devotees took him to Calcutta for treatment. During that time Golap-Ma said to Yogin-Ma in the course of conversation, "Look, Yogin-Ma perhaps the Master was angry with the Holy Mother and went away to Calcutta."

The Holy Mother heard this from Yogin-Ma, and hiring a carriage went to Calcutta. Weeping, she asked the Master, "You have come away, being angry with me. Haven't you?" "No, no, who told you this story?" the Master asked in surprise.

"Golap said," replied the Holy Mother. The Master was enraged to hear this and said, "Is that so? Did she speak thus and make you weep? Does she not know who you are? Where is Golap? Let her come, I'll teach her to desist from telling such stories." The Holy Mother was thus pacified and returned to Dakshineswar. Later when Golap-Ma came to the Master, he scolded her severely and said, "What did you tell her to make her weep? Do you not know who she is? Go this moment and seek her forgiveness." Immediately Golap-Ma walked all the way to Dakshineswar and said to the Holy Mother, weeping, "Oh Mother, the Master was terribly angry with me. I did not realise the seriousness of what I said, and merely blurted out those words." The Holy Mother did not say anything except, "Oh Golap! Oh Golap!" She patted her thrice on the back, smiling. All the grief of Golap vanished that moment, and her mind was restored to peace. This incident was narrated to us by Golap-Ma herself.

Revered Baburam Maharaj was performing Durga Puja at Belur Math and he took the Holy Mother there. The Holy Mother stayed in the garden house north of the Math. One lady devotee suddenly presented herself to the Holy Mother one night. Seeing her intense desire to see her, the Holy Mother said, "Look, if this kind of yearning is not there, can one get Him?"

In the year 1918 Golap-Ma was seriously ill. In that crisis, the Holy Mother was praying to the Master, "O Lord, please heal Golap. If Golap and Yogin are not here, I cannot stay here any longer. With them gone, how can I stay here?" She then said, "Yogin and Golap know all the stages of my life. Ah, Golap has no kind of shortcoming. She does not know anything of pride. And look, Yogin also is like that. In those days Yogin used to meditate with such concentration that even if mosquitoes sat on her eyes, she was unaware of them. Ah, those will be blessed who speak of them."

One day Yogin-Ma complained to the Holy Mother of the licentious behaviour of a devotee and said, "Mother, please warn him a little. Otherwise he will be spoiled." The Holy Mother replied, "My telling won't do, Yogin. If I tell him anything, he would not be able to listen. I am his Guru. If he cannot respect my words, then it would be inauspicious for him." Yogin-Ma did not say anything more.

One evening, after talking about diverse matters, the Holy Mother said, "Look, I suppose everybody says that I am restless with the thought of Radhu, that I am inordinately attached to her. If this little attachment were

not there, do you know, this body could not have survived after the Master's passing away. It is for his work that he has generated this attachment for Radhu and detained this body. When my mind withdraws from her, this body will not remain anymore."

In the year 1918 the Holy Mother was once quite unwell at Koalpara. At that time Yogin-Ma and revered Sarat Maharaj were with her. Radhu saw the serious condition of the Holy Mother and yet went away to her father-in-law's place. The Holy Mother did not want her to go. She said to Yogin-Ma, "Look here Yogin! Radhu has deserted me and gone away." Yogin-Ma replied, "Why won't she go, Mother? Did you not walk all the way to Dakshineswar to be with the Master? Do you not remember?" The Holy Mother smiled a little and said, "That is true, Yogin." The Mother recovered from this illness and came back to Calcutta.

At the Udbodhan, she said one day, "Look, when Radhu broke her attachment for me and went away, I thought perhaps this time I would pass away. But I see that still there is more of the Master's work to be done."

Once Yogin-Ma got a doubt: "The Master was a man of such renunciation, and I see the Holy Mother so deeply engrossed in this wretched world, with all her brothers and brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. I cannot understand this." One day while meditating on the Ganges Ghat, Yogin-Ma saw the Master. He was saying, "Look at that object floating on the Ganges." Yogin-Ma saw a new born baby tangled in entrails and filth, floating past in the Ganges. The Master now asked, "Can the Ganges be polluted by it? Can anything sully its purity? Know her to be like that. Do not doubt her. Know her (the Mother) and this (showing his own body) to be one." Returning from the Ganges, Yogin-Ma bowed down to the Holy Mother and said, "Mother, forgive me." "Why, Yogin? What happened?" the Holy Mother enquired. Yogin-Ma then narrated the incident and said, "I was unfaithful to you. So the Master made it clear to me today." The Mother smiled a little and said, "What of that? Doubts will arise and again faith will come. This way alone faith is strengthened. Gradually, after many such attempts, firm faith will come."

One lady devotee used to come to the Holy Mother at the Udbodhan. The Mother was quite fond of her. She was not of a good character. So among the monks, many used to wish that she did not come there. When the Holy

Mother was apprised of this, she said, "On the Ganges so many impure things float by. Does the Ganges ever become impure thereby?"

One devotee asked some questions of the Holy Mother and left. Later the Mother herself said, "Look, my dear, you must surrender and await His pleasure. Then alone will His grace descend:'

Once I asked her with regard to Japa, "How shall I do Japa'?" The Holy Mother replied, "With whatever thought you do Japa, that thought will take hold of the mind. Think that the Master is always yours." Later she demonstrated the way of doing Japa on the fingers.

While talking of her days in Vrindaban, after the passing away of the Master, the Holy Mother said one day at the Udbodhan, "Look, my dear, I prayed to Lord Radharamana, 'Lord, take away my fault-finding nature. May it be that I never can see anyone's fault.'"

The Holy Mother used to say, "Man is bound to make mistakes. One should not notice them. If one does not follow this rule, it harms oneself alone. By constantly observing the faults of others, in the end one will become a mere fault-finder." Once she said to Yogin-Ma, "Yogin, never notice anyone’s faults; else, you will end up as a fault-finder only."

One night at Jayrambati, the Holy Mother was lying down. As usual, I was then massaging her feet. In the course of conversation, she began to tell how she first gave initiation, "Look, my dear," she said, I was at Vrindaban after the Master's passing away. Every one was distraught with grief over his loss. One night the Master said, 'Why are you weeping so much? Where have I gone-except from this room to that?' One day the Master spoke of giving initiation to the boy Yogen. Hearing that, I felt a little afraid and also shy. Seeing him the first day I thought, 'what is this? And what will people think? Everyone will say that the Mother has already started making disciples.' But the Master repeated this instruction on three days in succession: 'I have not given him Mantra Diksha (initiation). You do it.' He told me which Mantra was to be given as well. In those days, I was not in the habit of speaking directly to the boy Yogen. The Master said that I should speak to him through Yogin-Ma. I then said the same thing to Yogin. She asked the boy Yogen and discovered that the Master had not initiated him. The Master appeared to the boy Yogen also and asked him to be initiated by me. Yogen

did not have the courage to speak of it to me. When I saw that the Master told both of us the same thing, I gave initiation to Yogen.

With Yogen's initiation my period of imparting initiations began. He served me unstintedly. No one else could have served as he did. Only Sarat could. And Sarat is serving only after the boy Yogen's demise. To carry my burden is very hard, my dear. Except Sarat, no one can bear my responsibility. Golap and Yogin-if they were not there, it would not have been possible for me to stay at Calcutta."

While the Holy Mother was at Jayrambati, one devotee came to her from Ranchi and said, "I have come to take you to Ranchi for a few days. Accommodation etc. have all been arranged." "Does Sarat know about this?" asked the Holy Mother. "No," was the reply. The Holy Mother continued, "Then I cannot come. Sarat came here and returned. I shall first go to Calcutta.

If he approves, then we shall see." The devotee persisted saying, "Mother, we have made all arrangements!" But the Holy Mother was firm. "Why did you do so without letting us know of it first?" she asked.

The devotee left. Later the Holy Mother remarked, "Look, my dear, they think that to take me is very easy. They are led away by popular excitement. Another time in Dacca, they printed pamphlets that I would be going there. Yet I knew nothing of it. Anyone can serve for two or three days. Is it easy to carry my whole responsibility? I have not seen that anyone is capable of it except Sarat. He is my Vasuki. With a thousand hoods he is engaged in so much work. Wherever a little water drips he will hold an umbrella there."

One day a woman devotee told the Mother about her strained relations with one of her friends. Thereupon the Mother said, "Look, my dear, if one loves a human being one has to endure grief and sorrow. If one can love God, one is indeed blessed, one has no more grief or sorrow."

Another day one woman devotee wished to learn the rituals connected with the Master's Puja from the Holy Mother. The Mother replied, "Look, you are in the world. You will not be able to do so much. You have received His name; let me see how much you can do with it. If you could do that properly, everything will be all right."

Once the Holy Mother gave me a silk cloth. Some one objected and said, "Why are you giving the cloth to her only, Mother? There are five more people waiting." The Holy Mother replied, "If I do not give it to her, who else will give? Tell me who else is there for her?"

Because of Radhu's illness the Holy Mother was staying at the rented boarding house of Nivedita's school in Bosepara. I was there to serve her. One day she asked me to make food offering to the Master. I did not know the Mantras etc., for offering food. So I told the Mother, "But, Mother, I do not know how to offer food to the Master." The Holy Mother then explained, "Look, my dear, think of the Master as your own and say, 'Please come, please sit down, please take, please eat,' and you must think that he has come, he has sat down, and he is taking food. Do you need Mantras etc., for your own near and dear ones? All ceremonies and forms are like the honour and respect shown to relatives when they come. With your own people you won't need all that. With whatever attitude you give him, with the same attitude he will take." After that the Holy Mother taught me a Mantra for making food offering to the Master.

The Holy Mother once said to a disciple, "Look, my dear, it is not that you will not face difficulties. They will arise. But they will not remain. You will see that they pass away like water under one's feet."

One devotee asked the Holy Mother, "I have done so much Japa and austerity, yet nothing has happened." In reply she said, "What you seek—is it any greens or fish that you could buy it by paying so much price?"

In Jayrambati the Holy Mother's close relatives used to harass her in various ways. One day she became so much vexed that she said, "Look here, do not trouble me too much. If the one who is within me once raises his hood, there is none among Brahma, Vishnu or Maheswara that can save you."

In the year 1919 the Holy Mother was at Koalpara. On the day of the Dassera festival some devotees worshipped her holy feet with lotus flowers and left. Later she asked me, "What is the matter today, that all those boys offered flowers at my feet?" "Today is Dassera," I replied. "That is why they did so." The Holy Mother smiled a little and said, "Oh dear, am I Goddess Manasa, then?" And folding her hand in the direction of the Master she continued, "He alone is Manasa, Ganga and everybody else."

Radhu was like a madcap during her stay at Jayrambati because of her neurosis. Many times the Holy Mother used to feed her. Often, she would take food in her mouth and spit it out on the Mother's body. One day the Holy Mother was annoyed and said to me, "Look, my dear, know this body (showing her own) to be a divine body. How much more defilement and insult could it endure? If it is not a divine body, can any human being endure so much? The Master never struck me even with a flower. He never addressed me as tui but always as tumi. How much he was distressed because once he addressed me as tui mistaking me for Lakshmi! Biting his tongue he said, Oh dear, is it you? Please do not take it amiss. I thought you were Lakshmi and so addressed you as tui' But see how these people take the life out of me, my dear. This time if the Master somehow cures Radhu, I will have nothing more to do with them. Look, my dear, as long as I live, none of these can know me. Later they will understand everything."

At the Udbodhan, during the Mother's last illness a certain monk came to see her. The Mother was then sleeping. The monk began to massage her feet. There was no veil over the Holy Mother's head at the time. After the monk went away, the Mother rebuked me, saying, "There was no veil over my head. Why did you not arrange it? Am I dead? Even now you are doing like this!"

At this time the Holy Mother had practically no taste for any food, and could not eat anything. Her food therefore was very meagre. One day while she was taking food, Dr. Kanjilal arrived there. He thought the quantity of the Holy Mother's food was a little too much, and said to me in front of the Holy Mother, "You will not be able to serve the Mother. Tomorrow I will bring two nurses for her service. You need not do anything." The Holy Mother heard these words of the doctor and said later, "Ha! Does he think that I will be served by those booted ladies? That I cannot do. You will attend upon me as you have done. Why does Kanjilal make so much fuss over my eating rice? Am I able to consume rice? He does not know!"

A few days after this her rice diet was completely stopped. One day the Holy Mother said, "Look, that day Kanjilal was annoyed at my taking rice. From that time on I could not eat any rice at all."

During those days the Mother's nature became like that of a five year old girl. One night at twelve when I went to feed her, she became stubborn. "I will not eat. You know only to say, 'Mother, eat,' and to put that stick (the

thermometer) under the arm." Seeing that the Holy Mother was refusing to take food, I said, "Then, Mother, shall I call Maharaj?" Often she would eat at the mention of Maharaj's name. But this time she was totally unwilling. She said, "Call Sarat. I will not eat from your hand." As soon as Sarat Maharaj heard of it, he hastened to the Holy Mother. She made him sit and said, "Just pass your hand over me a little, my son." Then taking both his hands in hers, she continued, "Just see, my son, how they are troubling me! Her constant utterance is 'Eat, eat,' and she knows also to put that stick under my arm. You ask her not to trouble me." Maharaj replied, "No, Mother, they will not trouble you anymore." Pacifying her thus, he later enquired, "Mother, will you now take something?" The Holy Mother replied, "Give me." Maharaj asked me to bring food. The Holy Mother heard this and said, "No, you feed me, I will not eat from her hand." I poured milk in a cup and gave it to Maharaj. He somehow fed a little of it to the Holy Mother and said, "Mother, rest a little and eat." Hearing this, the Holy Mother said, "Look now, what sweet words these are—'Mother, rest a little and then take food!' Do they not know how to say these words? But see, what trouble they have given the poor boy at this time of night! Go, my dear, go and sleep." Saying this, she stroked his body. Later Sarat Maharaj arranged her mosquito curtain and said, "Mother, I shall go now." The Holy Mother said, "Come, my dear, what a trouble we have given this poor boy."

For the last few days before her passing, the Holy Mother would not ask for any news of Radhu. One day she told her, "Look, you go away to Jayrambati. Do not stay here any more." She told me, "Tell Sarat to send them away to Jayrambati." I asked, "Why is she asking them to be sent away? Can she do without Radhu?" "Certainly I can," said the Holy Mother. "I have taken away my mind from her." I repeated these words of the Mother to Yogin-Ma and Sarat Maharaj. Yogin-Ma then came to the Holy Mother and asked, "Why, Mother, do you want them to be sent away?" The Holy Mother said in reply, "Yogin, hereafter they have to stay there only. H------ is going; send them with him. I have taken away my mind from them. I do not want them any more." Yogin-Ma protested, saying, "Do not say that, Mother. If you thus take away your mind, how can we live?" The Holy Mother replied, "Yogin, I have cut off my attachment; now no more of it." Yogin-Ma said nothing and informed Sarat Maharaj of all that took place. He said, "Then we may not be able to keep the Mother any more amidst us. There is no more hope, now that she has taken away her mind from Radhu." I was standing there. The Maharaj told me, "Look, all of you are with the Holy Mother for long hours. Try and see if you could turn the Mother's mind

a little towards Radhu." But all our efforts were in vain. One day she said quite forcefully, "The mind which I have withdrawn will never come back. Know it for certain."

Two or three days before passing away the Holy Mother called Sarat Maharaj and said, "Sarat, I am going. Yogin, Golap and others are here. You look after them."

Part 3: Recorded by Swami Ishanananda

It was the month of Jyeshtha of 1316 RE. (1909). One morning I heard that, on her way to Calcutta, the Holy Mother and her party would be reaching Koalpara that very evening at about four. Arrangements were already made for their reception. The Holy Mother was to be received in the shrine room of our teacher Sri Kedarnath Dutta (Swami Kesavananda), and the others, namely, Revered Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda), Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma and the rest, were to stay at our school. But even after dusk there was no trace of them. Later we got the news that their cart got stuck up near the river side. Immediately a few of the devotees set off in that direction, and, by and by, all of them arrived at about 10 p.m.

The Holy Mother, properly veiled, got down from the cart and went with Kedar Babu's mother to their shrine room, slightly dragging her feet. After she made Pranams to the Master and seated herself, all the assembled men and women bowed down to her. I also followed suit. Kedar Babu's mother was slightly deaf and so the Holy Mother was talking to the men devotees through me. In the meantime Revered Sarat Maharaj sent word that it was getting late and so the Holy Mother hurriedly finished her refreshment consisting of a piece of Sandesh and some water, and got up, ready for the journey. Along with the others in that crowd, I also hastily made Pranam to the Holy Mother and put my offering, which my father had given me for her, in her hand. The Mother affectionately fondled my chin and said, "My child, whatever is offered must be placed at the feet." She finally got into the cart.

Compared with the taste of her affection expressed through those few simple words, the love of my father and mother even seemed too paltry. I could feel it even at that age.

Once at the time of Jagaddhatri Puja, on her way to Jayrambati from Calcutta, the Holy Mother reached Koalpara Ashrama in the morning. Resuming her journey at noon, she said to the enthusiastic workers of the Ashrama, "Here, you alone are my relatives now. While I am in the village I depend only on you. I see, therefore, that the Master is residing here." One by one she blessed us all and said, "Come to Jayrambati now and then. Especially at the time of Jagaddhatri Puja, all of you must come."

And so, on the Jagaddhatri Puja day, the three of us went to Jayrambati, taking a load of vegetables and greens from our farm. The Holy Mother was much pleased to see us all and said, "Here vegetables are not always available. Now and then we are put to much difficulty. I see that the Master himself is arranging everything through y6u." From that time onwards whenever she stayed at the village, we used to finish our daily tasks at the Ashrama and go to her with vegetables twice or thrice a week either from our garden or purchased from the fair. On some days we reached the Holy Mother's place when she would be lying down and resting. On our making Pranam to her, after disposing of our offerings according to her directions, she would raise her head a little and bless us saying, "May your spiritual consciousness awaken, may you have faith and devotion!" and then ask us to take some puffed rice. We would take that and, munching it on the way, return to the Ashrama sometimes at midnight.

One winter day we took loads of vegetables and cow's ghee on our heads and reached Jayrambati by dusk, streaming with sweat. One of the ladies there who saw our state commented, "How much toil you are in for, as soon as you become a devotee! The poor boys' heads are worn off carrying loads." The Holy Mother heard this remark, and said, "Do they still have their heads? They have given them away to Him (the Master) to whom they belong.' After that she placed her hand on our heads most affectionately and blessed us. Later she sent word to the Ashrama that instead of sending such large quantities at a time, we should send them little by little. Otherwise the vegetables would dry up and get wasted. Thereafter we would take small loads and go to her presence much more frequently.

After the Jagaddhatri Puja the Holy Mother was to go to Calcutta. At that time, the Koalpara Ashrama was being stirred by a great wave of Swadeshi Movement and everyone's inclination was more towards handloom, spinning wheel etc. rather than towards worship and meditation, Japa and scriptural study. Hearing that the Holy Mother would be leaving, Kedar Babu went to Jayrambati for her Darshan. The Mother said to him, "Look, my dear, you have built a room for the Master and provided a resting place for me on my way. Therefore on my way I shall install the Master there. You make all arrangements. Worship, food offering, Arati etc. must be done regularly. What will you gain by merely making so much of Swadeshi? Whatever we may be, we are rooted in the Master. He is our ideal. Whatever you do, if you keep a firm hold on the Master, nothing will go wrong." Kedar Babu replied, saying, "But Swamiji exhorted us so much to work for the nation. If

he were alive today, how much would he have not done for the country!" Hearing this, the Mother said quickly, "Oh dear, if my Naren were here today, would the Company (meaning the British Government) leave him in peace? They would have locked him up in jail. I could not see it and live. Naren was an unsheathed sword. Returning from abroad, he said 'Mother by your grace this time, instead of leaping across, I went to their country in their own ship. Even there, the glory of the Master is evident in abundance! How many virtuous people came to me and listened enchanted to his teachings and accepted his ideas!'" Continuing, she said "They also are my children. What do you say?"

One or two incidents closely related to this come to my mind. Once at the time of Durga Puja, the Holy Mother gave me the responsibility of buying garments for her nephews and nieces. I bought for them all only Swadeshi (India-made) clothes. The girls did not like this at all and began to order as they pleased. I got irritated and said, "All that is foreign stuff. Do you think I will buy foreign goods?" The Holy Mother was sitting on one side. She said, smiling, "My dear, they too (foreigners) are my children. I have to run the house including everybody. Could I be one-sided? Please bring the things to suit their taste." Subsequently I observed that whenever any foreign articles had to be bought the Holy Mother would get them through others rather than tell me. It was not in her nature to hurt anyone's feelings.

But soon came news of police high-handedness. Two pregnant ladies, wife and sister of Deven Babu of Yuthavihar village, were arrested in connection with the Swadeshi Movement and were made to walk miles to Bankura Police station. On hearing this the Holy Mother's anger burst forth in blazing fury. At first she shuddered, saying, "What do you say!" Recovering from the shock she continued, "Is this the Company's order or is it the heroics of the Police? We never heard of such atrocities on innocent women under the rule bf Queen Victoria. If this act is indeed the order of the Company, their days are numbered. Were there no men there to slap those fellows and release the girls?" She was much pacified a little later by the news that the ladies were released and said, "If I did not hear this further news, I could not have slept at all tonight."

Another day when the Holy Mother was at Koalpara, Rashbehari Maharaj arrived there with some mangoes sent by Revered Sarat Maharaj. Just after his arrival Prabodh Babu also came to make Pranam to the Holy Mother. After enquiries about their welfare, the Holy Mother asked, "What is the war

news? What a destruction of humanity has taken place! What all arts of killing men have been invented! Nowadays, there are so many kinds of machines telegraph etc. Just see, Rashbehari started from Calcutta yesterday and reached here today. In those days with how much difficulty and after how much walking did we reach Dakshineswar!" Prabodh Babu was a little enthused by this. Praising the Western science and education, he said, "Under British Government the country has advanced very much in many fields." The Holy Mother agreed with him, but added, "But my dear, with all those comforts, the scarcity of food and clothing too has increased enormously in our country. Earlier such scarcity of food was not felt."

On her way to Calcutta the Holy Mother enshrined the Master's picture at Koalpara. She herself placed the Master's and her own photos and performed special Puja. The Homa was performed by Kishor-dada. At noon the Holy Mother went walking to Kedar Babu's house with his mother. While she was returning from there, P— Maharaj requested her to enter the palanquin. A little displeased, she got in. Reaching the Ashrama, she spoke to him, expressing the cause of her displeasure: "This is my own village, and Koalpara is my drawing room. These children are my near and dear ones. I come here and move about freely. Returning from Calcutta, I heave a sigh of relief. There you keep me fenced in. All the time I have to stay there quite cramped. Here, too, am I to come and go at your beck and call? That cannot be. You write that to Sarat." Then in great humility P—Maharaj began to entreat her pardon and said, "Sarat Maharaj particularly enjoined us to take all care of you. I felt that perhaps it is due to our lapse that you had to walk. But then, Mother, you are free to do as you like."

According to P — Maharaj's instruction, we were to make ready their food packets before six in the evening. But, however much we tried, we could not finish it in time. Seeing that P—Maharaj began to get angry. Brother Rajen said, "All right, you start off with these people according to your schedule. We shall get the food ready and bring it to you on our heads, however far you may have gone." The Holy Mother heard everything and said to P—Maharaj" "Why do you lose your head and show so much temper? This is my village. Do you think everything will click with the needle of the clock here, as in Calcutta? You see how the boys are breaking their bones since morning! Whatever you say, I will not move from here without taking food." Finally at about eight at night, finishing their meal they started towards Vishnupur in eight bullock carts.

The Holy Mother had just returned to Calcutta from Rameswaram (1911) after her Pilgrimage. We three went to meet her at the Udbodhan house and went upstairs to have her Darshan. We sat down after bowing down to her. She enquired after everybody at Koalpara and Jayrambati and said to Kedar Babu, "Hearing that you are coming, I have kept two photos of Rameswaram for your Ashrama. Take them with you when you go. You may worship them there." Kedar Babu replied, "But there you have yourself established the Master and asked us to worship him as the embodiment of all the deities. Now you are giving all these deities. How many gods shall we worship? We shall not be able to worship other gods." The Holy Mother did not press the matter. ."All right," she said. "Have these pictures properly framed and keep them in the shrine room." Kedar Babu enquired about her impression of Rameswaram etc. "My dear, Rameswar is the same as when I kept Him," said the Holy Mother. Golap-Ma was passing that way just then. Hearing these words, she asked innocently, "What did you say, Mother?" The Holy Mother looked startled and said, "When? What did I say? I am saying that I was very happy to see just the same as I have heard from you all." "No, Mother," Golap-Ma continued, "I heard everything and it won't do to try to give the slip now. What do you say, Kedar?" Saying this, she went off from there and started telling Yogin-Ma and others about it.

The Holy Mother continued "Ah, Sashi had me perform the Puja of Rameswar with a hundred and eight golden Bel leaves. The Rajah of Ramnad, hearing that I was there, sent his minister with instructions to show me the temple treasury. If I had a fancy for any article, it was to be immediately presented to me. What could I say? Unable to decide what to say, I replied ‘What do I need? Sashi is arranging for all our requirements.’ Again, thinking that they would be hurt, I said, ‘All right, if Radhu needs anything, she may take it.’ I told Radhu that she could take anything she liked. Then seeing all those priceless rubies and diamonds, my heart went pit-a-pat. Anxiously I prayed to the Master, ‘Oh Master, grant that no greed should arise in Radhu's mind.’ And so Radhu replied, ‘What of these shall I take? I do not need them. But I lost my pencil. Buy me a pencil.’ Hearing these words, I heaved a sigh of relief and bought her a two pice pencil at the roadside shop."

Conversing in this manner she got up to make food offering to the Master. We too came downstairs.

Two or three days before Janmashtami (Sri Krishna's birthday) I expressed to the Holy Mother my desire to be initiated by her on that day. Hearing this Golap-Ma said in her usual loud tones, "Such a little fellow (a boy of thirteen), asking for initiation! He is likely to forget the Mantra in two days. How thoughtless of Kedar! The Holy Mother is from your own village. When she goes there after due deliberation, you can get initiated." Thus remarking, she went away. But the Holy Mother rejoined reassuringly, "Don't you take Golap's words to heart, my dear. If one of your age learns anything well, can he ever forget it? Let the boy do whatever he can from now on. As for the future, I am with you always." And so she initiated me on the day of Janmashtami after the Master's Puja. Demonstrating the manner of doing Japa according to her instructions, she said, "Can you not keep this much in mind? Certainly you can. Later, as and when necessary, I will show you everything." And then she blessed me, touching my head and chest affectionately. Getting up from her seat, she asked me to go with her. I made Pranam to her and followed her into the next room. She took two sweets out of a vessel, bit off a small part of one and gave me the remainder, saying "Eat" I received the sweets in my hand and out of shyness was hesitating to eat them in her presence. Noticing my hesitation, she said, "Don't be shy. After initiation one must take food," and then gave me a glass of water to drink.

Soon after that, we returned to Koalpara along with Kedar

Babu's mother. (This old lady served the Holy Mother in various ways. At sixty years of age, she felt the desire to read and write and started with the first Reader, and towards the end she was able to read and understand the Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. Even when she accompanied the Mother to Rameswar, she went with her first Reader and a slate. She passed away six or seven years after the Holy Mother's demise). At the time of our departure, the Holy Mother gave some money to Kedar Babu asking him to buy some paddy and make some rice ready.

In the month of Phalgun, the Holy Mother returned to her village. From Koalpara three of us went far ahead early in the morning to receive her. Catching sight of her cart from a distance, the other two went back to inform the Ashrama. I remained to accompany the carts. The Holy Mother spotted me from a distance and was saying, "Who is that? B— is it not?" As I approached her and made Pranam, she enquired after every one's welfare. The carts were rolling on, while I walked alongside. The Holy Mother

peeped out of the cart and was asking questions like, "What village is this? Whose pond is that? How far is Koalpara from here," etc. As we left Kotulpur the Holy Mother said, "Why don't you get into the cart? You have walked far enough." But Radhu was in the cart along with the Holy Mother. A little later, the cartman got down from the cart and said, "You please sit in front. I'll walk a little." I then got in front. Seeing me handling the oxen and driving them faster, the Holy Mother burst out laughing, "Ah, you are an expert cartman! It is good to know all trades." In due time we reached the Ashrama. The Mother's was a rather delicate constitution. As she had sat for long cross-legged in the cart, her legs became numb. Kedar's mother helped her to get down from the cart and slowly led her to the shrine room verandah and seated her there. After a little rest, she bathed and said to me, "My dear, I cannot now exchange shouts with Kedar's mother (She was a little deaf). You change your dress and make arrangements for the Puja."

In my ignorance I put on one of the Mother's clothes and was going to pluck flowers. Noticing this, Kedar Babu's mother got quite upset and was saying, "You dunce! You are wearing the Mother's cloth! Leave them immediately. Leave!" But the Mother, said, "What does it matter? He is a young boy. What harm is there, if he wears my clothes? Go, go, bring flowers."

Kedar Babu said in the course of conversation, "Mother, all your children are learned men. Only we few are ignoramuses. Sarat Maharaj wrote a book on the Master and spread his teaching everywhere. Other children are all giving lectures and touring. How much work is going on!" At this the Holy Mother said, "What do you say? The Master himself was not learned. He learned only to keep his mind on God. Through you a great deal of work will be done in these parts. This time the Master has come to liberate all—the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish. Now there is a splendid Malaya breeze. Just set your sail a little, take refuge in him and immediately you will be blessed. This time anything other than grass and bamboo—whatever has a little core—will surely become sandalwood. What do you think? You are my own people. But do you know, a learned Sadhu is like an elephant with gold-sheathed tusks." Saying this, she got up for Puja. A little after dusk the Holy Mother left for Jayrambati in a palanquin.

The man who was to go from Koalpara as the storekeeper for Jagaddhatri Puja, fell ill. And so in his stead I went to Jayrambati. The Holy Mother said, "It is very good you have come. Today you observe everything. Tomorrow quite early in the morning take bath and come to the store. Attend to the

work there, observing all ceremonial procedures. Keep a little distance and carry on the work. Everything will be all right." She said these last words, because in those regions caste restrictions were quite strict.

On the day of the Puja, she came early in the morning to the store and took her seat on a sack, with her feet dangling. When anyone came for anything from the store, I showed the required things to the Holy Mother and then handed it over to the person. At the end of the Puja, the Mother bathed and went to the Mandap, taking the aunts with her for the flower offering. She offered flowers thrice at the feet of the Devi, and with hands folded, and the end of her Sari wound around her neck in humility, she sat silently for some time. Puja concluded without a hitch. In the noon many men and women of the village were fed. As I had fever on the second day—for the image had to be kept for three days the Holy Mother herself looked after the store. After evening Arati all the monks and devotees together started singing Bhajans. "Worry not to have the Mother's vision, she is not mere mother of yours or mine alone, She is the Mother of all, of the whole Universe" —thus they sang again and again. The Holy Mother was sitting in the next room with the other women and was listening with absorption. That night she remarked to me, "Ah! The singing was enthralling. What is caste to devotees? All children are one. I feel like feeding all of them from one plate. But in this wretched region they make much of caste. However, there is surely no objection to puffed rice. Tomorrow quite early in the morning you go to Kamarpukur and bring two seers of the Jilapis (a certain sweetmeat)." Next day I returned with the Jilapi by about 9 a.m. The Holy Mother offered them to the Master and arranged them in a big plate around the heap of puffed rice. This delicacy she sent to the devotees. In great joy all of us began to partake of it and the Holy Mother looked on us from the next room.

Once in the rainy season there was an epidemic of malaria and dysentery. The Holy Mother too suffered much for a few days from blood dysentery and recovered through Dr. Kanjilal's treatment Because of constant walking through mud and water in Koalpara, nearly all of us got fever. Noticing that from Koalpara none of us went to Jayrambati, the Holy Mother sent a maid to get news of us. She brought us a letter from the Mother to the following effect: "My dear Kedar, I have established the Master in that Ashrama. He used to take boiled rice and fish also. Therefore I say, you must offer boiled rice and fish to the Master, at least on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Do not offer fish on Sundays. By no means should you offer food to the Master without

three curries. If you practise too much of austerity, how can you withstand the malaria of these parts?"

A few days after this, the Holy Mother was speaking to Kedar Babu about Radhu. She said, "She has grown to be such a big girl and yet she has so little sense. What bondage has the Master brought on me through her! After he passed away, when I came to the village, completely indifferent to the world, I used to see a small girl wrapped about in red clothes, moving about before me." Seeing that Kedar Babu had become absent-minded, she said, "Oh Kedar, are you listening? That was Yoga Maya." Kedar Baba replied, "No Mother, I did not hear everything--please tell me again." Then the Holy Mother resumed: "After the Master's passing away when nothing in the world had any meaning for me and I was panting for release, I used to think, 'What is the point of my living any more?' In that state suddenly I saw a young girl of ten or twelve years dressed in red clothes, moving about before me. The Master showed her to me and said, 'Take her for support and live. Numberless children will come to you.' Next moment he vanished and I could not see the girl also any more. Later on one day I was sitting just in this place. Radhu's mother; my younger sister-in-law, was then totally mad. She was going this way dragging some rags behind her. And Radhu, crying bitterly, was crawling behind her. My heart bled at the sight and I rushed to take her up in my arms. I felt that no one would care for her if I did not. Her father was dead and her mother is that madcap. Thinking thus, no sooner had I taken her in my lap, than I saw the Master in front of me. He was saying, 'This is that girl. Live with her as your support. This is Yoga Maya!' What can I say, my dear! Earlier she was well. Now-a-days she gets all kinds of diseases, and she is married too. I am now afraid, that this daughter of a mad woman might herself turn mad. Have I, after all, brought up a madcap?"

While she was at Calcutta, the Holy Mother had once written to Kedar Babu, "If you could put up a room for me at Koalpara, then when I come to the village, I could stay with you." Receiving this letter, we ourselves constructed a house for her and called it Jagadamba Ashrama. When the Holy Mother came there for the first time, she stayed there nearly a fortnight before going to Jayrambati. Later, a day was fixed for her second visit. We got a palanquin ready. But on that day, right from the morning, it started raining cats and dogs. We got news that the water level in the river Amodar had risen quite high. Yet Kedar Babu said, "You take the palanquin as she has instructed and be present in time. There after you may do as she wishes." We came to the river and found it too deep. Rajen Maharaj swam across and

fetched a ferry, and all of us together crossed over with the palanquin and reached Jayrambati at about 3 p.m.

Uncle Kali rebuked us, saying, "In this weather how could you think of taking my sister?" The Holy Mother was much amused. Brother Rajen replied, "We have no power to take her. But we had promised to bring the palanquin today at this time, and so we have come." The Holy Mother on hearing this laughed and said, "You have kept your promise. I too should keep mine. I alone shall come in the palanquin. The others will follow afterwards." Thereupon we came forward, telling, "No, Mother, how can it be? In the rain, nobody is able to step out of their houses. Should we take you drenched in the rain and make you fall ill?" Uncle Kali and the Holy Mother laughed and laughed. Taking the empty palanquin we returned to our Ashrama.

But the Holy Mother fell ill immediately after, and so she could come to Koalpara only after a few months. One morning at about eleven when I went to Jagadamba Ashrama, all the ladies were in great excitement. Kedar Babu's mother said in a hushed voice, "She (the Mother) is in ecstasy. Saying 'Thakur' (the Master), she has just lost consciousness." The ladies attended on her, sprinkling water on her head and eyes. A little later when she recovered, Nalini-Didi asked, "Oh, aunt, what happened?" The Holy Mother replied, "What happened? It is nothing. I was trying to thread the needle and got dizzy." Hearing these words, no one spoke any more on the topic.

Later, during her last illness, the Holy Mother herself told me fully about this incident of ecstasy. That day it was about half past one or may be two. Her fever was rising. I, as usual, sat by her bed and was fanning her and massaging her forehead gently with a wet hand. Patting me affectionately, she looked at my face and said, "If I pass away, all of you will feel very miserable. I can understand that." In gentle reproach I said, "Why do you talk like that, Mother? When the medicine is not showing any effect, why don't you speak to the Master about your body? Everything will get right, if you do that." The Holy Mother smiled a little and said, "At Koalpara I used to get such high fever that I lay unconscious in my bed frequently. Yet when I became conscious and thought of the Master for the sake of my body, immediately I could have his vision. In a very weak state, I was one day sitting in the verandah. Nalini and others were perhaps sewing. There was the burning heat of the sun all around. Suddenly I saw that the Master

entered through the main door, sat in the verandah and then stretched himself down to sleep. Seeing that, I hastily went to spread my upper cloth. While spreading, I had a peculiar feeling. Kedar's Mother and others were making all kinds of fuss. So I told them, 'O! It's nothing. While trying to thread the needle, I got dizzy'. For your sake, do I not pray to the Master about my body? I do pray. But now when I think of him for the sake of the body, by no means am I able to get his vision. I feel it is not his wish that this body should remain. Sarat is there." After my return to Koalpara I heard just the same thing from Kedar Maharaj's mother also. She must have heard it from the Mother herself.

Another day at about two in the noon, I reached Koalpara. It was quite hot. The Holy Mother brought me some sweets and water, and was talking, "Oh dear, what a heat! Cool yourself a little. You should not leave before evening. How is Gopesh? What did you eat today? What did you cook? Take some fruits and vegetables with you when you go." I said smiling, "In accordance with Gopesh-da's instructions I mixed together green plantains, potatoes and such things and cooked a potato-rice. But as I was not able to make a proper estimate, I prepared food enough for eight or ten people." Hearing this, the Holy Mother had a hearty laughter. As we chatted, the sky became overcast. The Mother said "Ah! A little rain would cool down mother earth." Moments later, strong winds blew and a hailstorm began. Enjoying that, the Holy Mother put one or two hail stones in her mouth. This sudden exposure to chill brought on her a fever, which took a very serious turn later on.

Rashbehari Maharaj and I were sitting on either side of the Holy Mother's bed one day. She placed her hand on my chest and back and said, "Ah! So many women are here, but no one's body is cool. These are boys and their bodies—how cool they are! My hand is soothed." In the travails of illness the Holy Mother used to look for Sarat Maharaj a great deal. Getting the news, Sarat Maharaj arrived there accompanied by Dr. Kanjilal and went straight to the Holy Mother. The Mother was then restless with a burning sensation all over her body and was stretching her arms this way and that. Sarat Maharaj saw that and taking off his shirt sat by her bed. The Holy Mother put her hand on his back and said "Ah, my whole body is cooled. Sarat's body is like a cool slab." Sarat Maharaj said, "Look now, Mother. All of us have come, and now you must get well." In reply the Mother said, "Yes, my dear; if Kanjilal gives a little medicine I shall immediately get well." Sarat Maharaj was very happy to hear these words. Within a few days,

she was free from fever, and she began to take her normal food. One day Sarat Maharaj said, "Mother, this time we shall not leave you here. I would like to take you with me to Calcutta." The Holy Mother also did not seriously object to this but said, "My dear, I must go to Jayrambati and start on an auspicious day." Sarat Maharaj agreed to this and set about fixing the day for going to Jayrambati.

It was during this illness of the Holy Mother that Swami Prajnananda passed away at the Udbodhan. Later the Holy Mother came to know that his sister, Sudhira, the head of the Nivedita School, was sitting quietly by his side, fully controlling her emotions. Hearing that, the Holy Mother said, "Oh! It would have been better if she had expressed her feelings through weeping. It would have somewhat assuaged her grief. You please see that she does not fall ill. Already she has a heart complaint."

In this connection another incident comes to my mind. I was then at Jayrambati with the Holy Mother. One day I returned to Jayrambati from Koalpara with an old woman carrying a headload of things for me. The old woman put down her load and bowed down at the Holy Mother's feet. "What is the matter, my daughter?" she said. "You have not come this side for so many days?" The old woman replied in a piteous voice, "Mother, now-a-days I am in great difficulties. Searching for food, I go to different places. And so, when there is an occasion to bring a load here, the gentlemen do not find me in time. A few days back, my young earning son passed away." The Holy Mother was much affected to hear this and her eyes were filled with tears.

"What do you say, my daughter?" she said. On the Mother expressing her sympathy, the old woman gave way to her grief and wept loudly. The Holy Mother was overcome by a wave of sympathetic grief, and she began to lament with the woman, resting her head on a post of the verandah. The other women of the house rushed to the spot on hearing the sound, and stood transfixed there for a minute at the sight they saw. A few moments passed in this way. When the intensity of their grief subsided a little, the Holy Mother asked for some coconut oil. It was brought and she poured it on the old woman's head. After properly oiling her hair the Holy Mother tied a quantity of puffed rice and molasses in her cloth. Bidding her farewell, with her eyes still glittering with tears, the Mother said, "Come again, my daughter." The woman departed, highly consoled by the compassionate conduct of the Holy Mother.

After she recovered the physical strength a little, the Holy Mother went to Jayrambati on the appointed day, accompanied by Sarat Maharaj and others. All men and women of the village came to see her. Some said that they had given up all hope of seeing her again. The Mother replied, "Yes, I suffered very much from illness. Sarat, Kanjilal and others rushed to my help. By the grace of Mother Simhavahini, I was saved this time. Sarat says I must go to Calcutta. If all of you permit me, I shall go and return after regaining my health." Everyone gladly gave her permission, and seven or eight days later the Holy Mother started for Calcutta.

A few months later, I came to Belur Math. Radhu was ill at Udbodhan. She could not stand even a little noise. The Holy Mother therefore took her to the Boarding Home of Nivedita Girls' school. So I used to go there often to pay my respects to the Mother. She was considerably worried and would say, "Well, where can I go with her? The village is quiet enough but there is no medical facility."

On Swamiji's birthday I came to know that the Holy Mother was leaving for her village the next day. In obedience to Revered Sarat Maharaj's instruction I hastily reached the Udbodhan house by evening, ready to accompany the Holy Mother. She was packing a bundle of coir. Seeing me, she said, "I am going to my village taking these endless number of things. What about your coming with me? You boys are my only support there." I bowed down at her feet and said, "Whatever you command will be done. I shall go with you, what difficulty is there?" "That is good, my dear. See to these ropes and things and pack up all other items of luggage. Till now nothing has been set in order. I was waiting for you and packed the ropes." Along with her I packed things until eleven in the night, and quite early next morning we left on our journey.

After resting at Vishnupur for three days, we started again with our six bullock carts. Eight miles further at the Jaypur village, arrangements were made at an inn for cooking. At the time of taking down the pot of rice from the fire place, the pot broke and rice and water got scattered all over. We were stupefied and did not know what to do. But without any hesitation or excitement, the Mother took a broken shred and separated the water from the rice. She then washed her hands, took out the Master's picture from her box and set it up on one side. Gathering the upper layers of the scattered rice, she arranged the rice and some curry on a leaf plate. With that make-shift

offering, she said to the Master with folded hands, "You have willed it this way for today. Please finish your meal quickly while it is hot." All of us witnessed this strange procedure of the Holy Mother and began to laugh. Thereupon she remarked, "We have to adjust our ways to changing circumstances. Now please sit down for your meal, all of you." We sat down in a circle. The Mother served us all and served herself also on one side, sat down cross-legged and started eating. "Quite well-cooked," she said. We finished our meal and the carts moved on again. By eleven in the night we reached Koalpara.

Yet another incident comes to my mind. Once Revered Gauri-Ma was going to Jayrambati to call on the Holy Mother. From Koalpara she took me for company, and we started in the evening. We reached the river bank near Jayrambati while there was still daylight. So Gauri-Ma lingered there. So we could reach the Mother's house only a little after dusk. She asked me to wait outside the gate, and went in. There imitating the beggars, she called out, “O mother, give me alms, mother." Hearing that, the younger aunt came out, enquiring, "Who is that?" Gauri-Ma repeated her cry. The aunt was quite frightened. With a shriek she ran back to the Holy Mother. The Mother, who had heard the shout, came out with composure, and said in a firm voice, "Who is there?" Gauri-Ma once again said from the same place, "Give me alms, Mother, I am a night beggar." The Holy Mother recognised her voice in the dark and exclaimed, "Is it not you Gaurdasi! Come, come, when did you arrive?" Everyone had a hearty laugh.

After staying for a day or two at Koalpara, Radhu developed a liking to the place, especially because of its loneliness. So the Holy Mother stayed there with her for six months. Arrangements were made for Radhu's stay in another lonely house, a little away from Jagadamba Ashrama. A thorny thicket surrounded the three sides of her house. One day the Holy Mother said to me, "Now-a-days I find my mind is having a strange power. Whatever thought arises, it comes true, be it good or bad. Radhu likes this forest because it is lonely. For a few days I have been feeling that, wherever you may be during the day time, after dusk you must come here and be with us. I am much afraid, my dear. I told Rajen also. He will come after ten or eleven in the night." From that day, after dusk, I used to keep watch under a tree in front of Radhu's house until eleven in the night. The Holy Mother too would sit up by me and talk with me in a very low voice. One day she remarked, "What a jungle! Any day a bear may pop out." I replied, "Why, Mother, I never saw a bear in these parts." But as a matter of fact one or two

days later, word came that about a mile away, in the village Desra, one huge bear did attack and kill an old woman at noon while she was collecting cow dung. The bear too was shot. At dusk the Holy Mother said, "Did you not hear of the bear being on the rampage? It seems it has killed the mother-in-law of Ambika (the watchman of Jayrambati). And you declare there are no bears in this area!"

The Holy Mother used to eat some sweets and have a drink of water at dusk. She used to give me also a portion of it when I sat with her under the tree. She would say, "After the whole day's labour if you eat something and drink some water, the body will be quite refreshed. Thereafter, be it in Japa, meditation or any other work, the mind will settle down quite steadily." One day she said, "While I was staying at the Nahabat for the service of the Master, what hard conditions I had to endure in that tiny room! How many articles and things! I used to keep fish in a pot for the Master and hang it up. But in his service I never felt these as difficulties. The day would go by in inexplicable bliss. Now I am in these straits on account of Radhu. I am sitting here in this jungle with all of you. Good deeds, austerities, meditation—are all no more. Now by His grace, if we come out of the present difficulty safely, we should consider ourselves fortunate. (Radhu was then nearing her confinement). A little later the lady from Navasan came and said, "O Brother, did you hear? Today at noon the Mother and I were sitting here, quite alone. The Mother was saying, 'Those two crows used to come right at this time, and sitting on that tree caw and caw, to the great annoyance of Radhu. But for the last few days, I do not see them at all. Can you tell where those two have gone?' Even as the Mother was saying these words, those two crows alighted on the tree and began cawing." The Holy Mother too laughed and confirmed her story saying, “Yes, my dear."

Another day, in the early part of the month of Ashadha (June) the Holy Mother and a few of us were seated at the foot of the tree. It might be about 10 p.m. Suddenly the Mother said, "Look, that mad man has not been coming here for many days. He is stark mad, but sings quite well. Yet, my dear, I am greatly afraid lest he should come here and create a commotion." The sister from Navasan protested, "Why do you think of him, Mother? Suppose your thought turns true, and he pops up here at this time of night!" "Who knows, my dear," rejoined the Holy Mother. I intervened and said, "You are merely imagining. In this weather how can anyone cross the river and come here?" Even as these words came out of my mouth, there stood the mad man, with a palm leaf plume on his head and a bundle of sajina greens

under his arm. "I have brought these greens for you," he said. The sister from Navasan slipped inside, in fright. The Holy Mother said to him, "Go away. Don't make noise at this time of night."

The mad man replied: "How can I go? There is high tide in the river." I intervened saying, "How did you come then?"

The mad man replied: "I swam across."

The Holy Mother now said once again, "My dear fellow, don't make noise." The mad man then went away without a word. For two months the Holy Mother was in this mood often.

On another occasion I was sitting near the Mother in the verandah opposite Radhu's room, writing up the accounts. As a woman devotee passed by carelessly, the end of her cloth brushed my back. The Holy Mother noticed this and was much annoyed. "What is this? This boy is sitting before me and writing; and you are so unmannerly as to go brushing the ends of your cloth against his back! These are Brahmacharins (monastics), and you are women; you should move with due deference towards them. Bow down to him." The Holy Mother said these words in such an irritated voice that all the women of the house, including the woman so addressed, were frightened.

One new Brahmacharin at Koalpara desired to stay with the Holy Mother for a few days. To him the Mother said: "You want to stay with me. But you will have to face many difficulties if you stay here. I have a lot of work, and I am in this jungle with Radhu." But seeing the earnestness of the young man, she continued, "All right; tell Kedar and stay here for a few days," Just at that time, the attendant who looked after Radhu had to go to Calcutta for a few days. The Holy Mother enquired if the Brahmacharin could manage that work, and when he agreed, she asked him to learn the work from the regular attendant. On the very first day as he was carrying Radhu's food, the vessels slipped from his hands and all the food was spilt. He could not decide what to do. He took the empty vessels to the Holy Mother. The consequence was that Radhu had to go without food that day. The Holy Mother was much vexed. Later she said, "As a monastic this boy may be quite good. But in my establishment I need dexterous workers. My work cannot be done by a 'foot-of-the-tree' monk. And again there are people who perform wonderful deeds under momentary excitement. But a man's true worth can be known only by observing the attention he bestows on his daily inconsequential actions." As

the regular attendant returned within a day or two, the Brahmacharin had no chance to stay.

Yet another day one boy of Koalpara escaped from Police observation and came to the Holy Mother at dusk, wishing to be initiated. As the police kept a watch on the Ashrama of that place, the head of the Ashrama told him to go away. The Holy Mother came to know of this and told me, "See, the boy has come with such eagerness, braving so many difficulties. If you could arrange to keep him in somebody's home for this night, then in the morning I shall initiate him and ask him to go." As desired by her, I found him accommodation elsewhere for the night.

Next day quite early in the morning I was going to Radhu's house with the Holy Mother. The boy had bathed in readiness for initiation, and cutting across the fields, approached the Holy Mother. She asked me to bring some water from a nearby pond and I brought a tumbler full of it. The Holy Mother was looking around for something, and I asked her if I could get her a seat. She replied, "Yes. But you need not go, again. Bring some hay and we two will sit." I did accordingly. They spread the hay and sat down on the ground. Asking me to move away, the Holy Mother purified herself by sipping water and initiated him.

Continued…

Part 4: Recorded by Swami Ishanananda

One day at dusk, the Holy Mother said in the course of a conversation, "I can no longer see or hear of anybody's faults, my dear. It all happens according to one's Prarabdha, the effect of past deeds. Where a ploughshare has to hit, at least a needle must prick. They speak of the faults of A—. Where were they at that time? How much he served me! In those days I was boiling paddy in my brother's houses. My sisters-in-law were all too young. Not minding the cold or rain, he used to work with me from dawn to dusk, taking down huge vessels of boiled paddy from the ovens. Now so many come as devotees. Then who was there with me! Are we to forget all the happenings of those days? Besides, what is his fault? In earlier days I also had an eye for people's faults. Thereafter I wept and wept before the Master, praying, 'O Master! I do not wish to see anyone's faults' and finally got rid of that habit. You might have done good to a man a thousand times and harm only once; he will turn away from you for that one offence. People see only the faults. One should in fact note the merits."

One day at Jayrambati the Holy Mother said in connection with the evil mentality of some of the attendants, "Look, there is certainly what is called Sevaparadha, faults in serving. That means: as one serves, gradually one becomes more proud and egoistic, and then one wants to make a puppet of one's master. Whether the master sits or stands or eats, he must do so at the bidding of the attendant. The attitude of service completely disappears from them. Why should people turn out to be so— people who serve a saint forgetful of their own bodies, and take the master's joy and sorrow for their own? Is there a greater degeneration? Most holy men have an aura of grandeur around them. Attracted by that, many come to serve them and remain intoxicated by that grandeur. That will cause their downfall. How many can serve the holy men with the proper attitude?" The Mother then narrated a story: "Look, the story goes like this. In a tank there was a reflection of the full moon. Seeing that, all the small fish of the tank were immensely pleased. They leaped and splashed and played around the moon, thinking that it was one among them. But when the moon went down, they were the same old lot. All leaping and playing came to an end—they never understood anything." I said, "Kedar Maharaj says that one should not remain long with one's Guru. Seeing the commonplace actions of the Guru, the disciple's faith and devotion may be reduced." The Holy Mother said, laughing, "But, my dear, don't you go spoiling your minds with all those

words. If it is true, how can I get on with my work? Do not entertain such a godly attitude, but have a human attitude towards me, and attend to what I say, and carry on with your work. You need have no fear."

There were, a very 'large number of letters from devotees on one occasion. At dusk I read them all to the Holy Mother. She heard them through and said, "Did you notice how many children have written with how many different desires? Some Say, 'I pray so much, meditate and tell so' many beads and yet nothing happens.' Others write about the anxieties, fears, wants, diseases and sorrows of this world. I cannot hear any more of this. I say to the Master, 'O Lord! In this world and in the next, you alone have to save them.' Where is the yearning? They speak so much of their devotion and earnestness on the one hand, and on the other they are so pleased with any little enjoyment they come to have and say, 'Ah! How merciful is He!' That is the measure of their devotional hankering. They say, 'How is Radhu's health?' That is to please me—this anxiety for Radhu. As soon as I pass away, no one will even look at Radhu." The sister from Navasan now said, "Mother, for you all children are equal. But to those who want to know the desirability of marriage, you give permission to marry. To those who want to renounce the world, you give instruction praising renunciation. Should you not take them all on the one path that is good for all?" To that the Holy Mother said in reply, "Will they abstain because of my prohibition if their desire for enjoyment is strong? And to those who have understood by virtue of great merit that all this is Maya's play, and believe that God alone is the reality, should I not offer a little help and encouragement? Is there any end to the miseries of the world?"

Nalini-Didi and others argued among themselves for some time and finally asked the Holy Mother, "Aunt, what kind of false description is good?" The Holy Mother, expressing her wonder at the question, said, "False description is by itself bad. In that how can there be good and bad again?" After a little talk of this sort, she said, "But then it is better to be described as a rich man though falsely. If anyone were to be told that he is quite rich; whatever humility or displeasure he may show in his face upon hearing these words, in his heart of hearts he will feel quite happy." The Mother now passed on to another topic and said, "Now to another question. Well, let me see if you can tell what object is to be prayed for from God?" Nalini-Didi replied, "Why, aunt; wisdom, devotion, objects that make you happy in life, all these are to be prayed for." The Holy Mother said "To say in one word, we must pray for Nirvasana, freedom from desire.

Desire is at the root of all sorrows, the cause of repeated births and deaths, and the main obstacle on the path of liberation."

In the month of Sravan, the Holy Mother came to Jayrambati from Koalpara, accompanied by Radhu. At the time, we were fifteen or twenty people in her house. The Holy Mother herself would look after the welfare of every one. One day she told me in the course of a conversation, "My dear, that day, what in the world did Kedar tell me, accusing A—? Kedar after all is a man with a generous heart. For such generous man it is not at all proper to speak as he did. I understood his mind, and at the time of my departure gave him a binful of paddy for the expenses of the Ashrama. But he did not wish to take it. He discovered his own error and has come to seek my forgiveness." Thus saying, she narrated the whole incident. "That day he (Kedar) came in the morning to make Pranam and said, 'Mother, all these people were quite obedient to me before. But now they have grown 'wise' and do not always wish to respect my words. When they come to you or to Sarat Maharaj, you treat them with great affection and keep them with you. They get nice things to eat also. If you do not entertain them, but convince them of the error and send them back, they will be obedient to me.' I replied, 'What are you saying? Our root is love alone. Out of love alone the Master's family has grown up. And I am their mother. How dare you make spiteful remarks to me about my children's requirement of food and clothing?' Ah, how much I prayed for them, wept for them before the Master! That is how they have today a monastery and such other things by his grace. After the Master's passing away, his children renounced the world and gathered together at one place for a few days. Thereafter one by one they left and were wandering here and there. Then I felt very sad. I began to pray to the Master: 'O Lord, you have come, performed your divine play with these few people, enjoyed yourself and gone away. Is everything finished with that? If so, what was the need for you to come, taking so much trouble? I saw in Kasi and Vrindaban so many Sadhus who live by begging and dwell under the shade of trees, wandering at will. There never was any dearth of such Sadhus. I cannot bear to see my children, who have left everything and come away taking your name, wandering around for the sake of a few handfuls of food. It is my prayer that those who come away in your name should not lack food and clothing, that all of them stay together, taking you, your memory and your teachings for their support; and that those who are scorched by the miseries of worldly existence come to them and obtain peace and solace by learning of your life and teachings. This was the purpose of your advent. It wrings

my heart that they should wander here and there shelter less.' Since that time, slowly Naren built up all this."

At the time of Durga Puja at Jayrambati on the Ashtami day a devotee was coming with a basketful of lotus flowers. He saw me at a distance, and raising his hands together with the basket, saluted me. The Holy Mother saw this from a distance. Later she told me, "We cannot worship the Master with these flowers now. Throw them away."

Two of us were wearing borderless clothes. The Mother noticed it and said, "Why are you wearing plain clothes without a border? You are young men. You must wear clothes with nice borders. Otherwise your minds will get old. One must always have enthusiasm," and she gave each of us clothes from her box.

On the same day a little after dusk, Sandhi Puja was performed. Many offered lotus flowers at her feet as Pushpanjali. The Holy Mother said, "Bring more flowers. Rakhal, Tarak, Sarat, Khoka, Yogen, Golap--offer flowers in the names of each of them. Offer flowers for the sake of all my known and unknown children." I did so and with folded hands the Holy Mother sat erect for a long time steadily looking at the Master. Finally she said, "May all be blessed in this world and in the next!"

One morning Kedar Maharaj sat near the Holy Mother at Jayrambati and asked her, "Mother, in our free dispensary those who are fairly well off also come to take medicines. But our dispensary is meant for the poor only. Is it right that such people are served?" The Mother thought for a minute and said, "My dear, in these parts all are poor. Yet, knowing all the details, if they still come to wait for free medicine, you will of course serve them if you can. Anyone who comes begging may be considered poor."

Kedar Maharaj asked, "Mother, is it for the establishment of the harmony of all religions that the Master came this time?" The Holy Mother replied, "Look here. I never felt that he practised all the religions with the intention of teaching the harmony of all religions. He was always immersed in God-consciousness. He followed all the disciplines—those of Christians, Muslims, Vaishnavas, etc.—for the sake of God-realization, and he enjoyed the Divine lila (play) in different ways, entirely unconscious of how time passed. But still, do you know, my dear, in this age renunciation has been his speciality. Has anyone ever seen at any time that kind of spontaneous

renunciation? What you have said of the harmony of religions is also true. In other Incarnations one ideal or another was emphasised over others."

That day after dusk, I went to the Holy Mother as usual, after finishing my duty of baking bread, to read her mail to her. One woman devotee often wrote letters full of praise and glorification of the Holy Mother. I told her its essence. She heard everything and said, "Look, many times I wonder, I am but the daughter of Ram Mukherjee, and many women of my age are there at Jayrambati. How do I differ from them? All these devotees come from various places and bow down to me. On asking them I find that some are doctors, some are lawyers. Why do these people come?" She was silent for a while. A little later I said, "Well Mother, do you not then always remember your real nature?" The Holy Mother replied, "Is it possible always? If it were so, can all this work go on? Yet amidst all this work whenever the desire arises, inspiration comes in a flash upon a little thought and the whole of the play of Mahamaya comes to be understood." Someone said, "How, Mother, even with so much effort we are not able to understand anything!" The Holy Mother reassured her, "It will come, my dear, it will come. Why are you worried? In due time everything will come." We were talking late into the night. I said. "Mother, Kedar Maharaj says. 'You exert yourself doing all this work and then what should happen will happen of itself.' "The Holy Mother replied, "You must work, of course. Work keeps the mind in order. But Japa, meditation and prayer are quite essential. At least once at dawn and dusk one must sit down for spiritual practices. It is like the rudder of a ship. When you sit at dusk, you get to think of all that you have done and not done during the day. Then you have to compare the states of your mind yesterday and today. Then doing Japa one has to meditate on the form of one's Ishta. Though in the beginning, one sees only the face of the Ishta, one must meditate on the whole form from the feet upwards. Along with work, if you do not meditate morning and evening, how can you understand whether you are working on the right lines?" I said, "Some others say that we gain nothing by work, that everything is gained if we can meditate and do Japa all the time." The Holy Mother answered, "How did they know that by this they gain and by that they do not? By meditating a little for a few days, is everything accomplished? Unless Mahamaya opens the way nothing will happen by any means. Did you notice the other day, how one man forcibly did more Japa than he could stand and got his mind deranged? If the mind is gone, what remains? It is like the thread of a screw. If one thread is loose, the fellow becomes mad, or falls into the trap of Mahamaya and thinks himself very clever, that he is doing fine. On the other hand if it is tightened the right

way, one goes along the correct path and obtains peace and bliss. One must always remember Him and pray, 'Lord, grant me good tendencies.' How many can do Japa and meditation all the time?

"It may be that one does these for some length of time in the beginning. Because of this one becomes egotistic like N—. Afterwards he fails to do even that, but sits thinking of all kinds of things, which only generates restlessness in his mind. Far better is it to work than to let the mind loose to indulge in riotous thinking. If the mind is allowed a little laxity, it will create such a turmoil. My Naren observed all this and so laid down the foundation of selfless work." Referring to N—, the Holy Mother continued, "Just see, sitting and sitting, what an impure mind N— has acquired! The purity-mania alone is on the increase, and there is constant complaint of want of peace. Why so much restlessness? In spite of such experiences, why is it that wisdom does not dawn on him?"

Next day at about ten or eleven the Holy Mother was sitting at the main entrance. We were in the drawing room. Uncle Kali and Uncle Varada were exchanging words over the path between their houses, and gradually it developed from words into an exchange of blows. The Holy Mother could not restrain herself any longer. She rushed towards them. Now she would scold one saying, "It is your fault," and next she would try to drag away the other. She was caught up in the fray. At this juncture we all ran to the spot, whereupon the quarrel subsided a little. Still abusing each other, the two brothers withdrew to their respective houses. Still angry, the Holy Mother too came back and sat down. No sooner had she sat than she burst out laughing. "What a play of Mahamaya! Here is this wide earth, spreading endlessly. This bit of land too remains there always. Puny man cannot understand even this much!" Saying this, she rocked with a prolonged laughter.

Six months had passed after Radhu's child was born but still she could not stand up because of weakness. She could only crawl about. What was worse, she got addicted to opium. The Holy Mother's health too was not good. Now and then she would have attacks of fever. She was trying to wean Radhu away from opium eating. But Radhu was quite cross over it all the time. That morning the Holy Mother was cutting vegetables. Radhu came and was waiting for opium. The Mother understood and said, "Radhu, why don't you stand up? I cannot bear with you any more. For your sake I left all my spiritual practices. How do you think I can meet so much expense?" At this

mild rebuke Radhu got angry, and taking a big brinjal from the wicker basket in front, she hit the Mother very hard on the back with it. As I turned my eyes at that thudding sound, I saw the Holy Mother rise, curling her back in pain. Immediately that spot was swollen. Looking at the Master, the Holy Mother prayed, "O Lord! Do not take notice of her actions. She is an idiot." Touching the dust of her feet to Radhu's forehead, she said, "Radhi, never once did the Master speak harshly to this body, and you give me so much trouble! How can you understand where my place is? Simply because I put up with you, what do you think of me?" Radhu burst out weeping.

A few days after this incident one day, Radhu's mad mother, out of some whim, searched for her son-in-law, Manmatha, in many places. She even got into the pond in her search and came to the conclusion that he was drowned, and that it was all the manipulation of the Holy Mother. She then ran to the Holy Mother in her wet clothes, fell at her feet and started shouting and weeping, "Oh dear, Oh sister-in-law, my son-in-law is drowned in the pond. Oh dear, what is to be done now?" This was a bolt from the blue to the Holy Mother. She was upset and called to us, "Come quickly. Just hear what this mad woman is saying." We all rushed there. Hari said that he saw Manmatha playing cards with his friends. "Make haste and bring him here," said the Holy Mother. We immediately left and returned with the son-in-law. Seeing him, the mad aunt was embarrassed and withdrew angrily, pronouncing curses on the Holy Mother.

In the evening the Mother was cutting vegetables for the night. Suddenly the mad aunt came and sat near her and said, "You fed Radhu with opium and disabled her. Thus you keep her in your control. You do not allow my daughter and granddaughter even to approach me." The Holy Mother retorted, saying, "Take away then your precious daughter. She is there lying like a lump. Have I kept her hidden anywhere?" After one or two exchanges like this; the aunt's madness reached its peak. She ran to bring a burning firebrand to beat her with. The Holy Mother shrieked in terror, "Oh, who is there, this mad woman will kill me!" I ran to the spot. I found the mad aunt aiming the blow and the fire brand about to fall on the Mother's head. I snatched it away from the mad aunt and pushed her out of the main door. Shaking with anger, I threatened her and forbade her ever to enter our portals again. The Holy Mother too was quite excited and blurted out these words. "Mad woman! What were you about to do? That hand of yours will rot and drop." No sooner did she say this, than she bit her tongue and shuddered. Turning to the Master, she said with folded hands "O Lord, what

have I done! What is the way out now? Never did a curse on anyone ever come out of my mouth till now. Finally that too has occurred. What more?" I was stunned to see this boundless compassion of the Holy Mother.

A few months before, Sri N— of Bangalore had come on a short leave to see the Holy Mother at Koalpara. Seeing that the Mother had to incur much expense on account of Radhu, he used to send considerable amounts as monetary offering to the Mother. At the time of his departure he said to the Holy Mother, "Mother, whenever you feel any want of money, please inform me without any kind of hesitation." With the passage of time the expense at Jayrambati had greatly increased. Revered Sarat Maharaj wrote saying that there was some delay in arranging for money and that he would therefore be late in sending it. Listening to this letter, the Holy Mother said, "Then Sarat does not have much money in hand. Otherwise, why would he write like that? N— had offered to help that day. But ah! How can I ask money of him? O Master, can I not obey your last instruction? Radhi, for your sake I am about to lose everything. The Master had said, 'Look, never stretch out your hand for money before anyone. You will not be in want of simple food and clothing. If you stretch your hand for a pice before anyone, you will be selling your head to him. Yet to live on charity is better than to live under another's roof. Wheresoever your devotees may keep you in their homes and look after you, don't you ever lose your own house at Kamarpukur.'"

A boy named Manasa came to the Holy Mother. He wanted to be initiated and become a Sannyasin. The Holy Mother satisfied his desire with much pleasure. He was very glad and sitting in Uncle Kali's drawing room sang the two songs: 'There is nothing in the world, Shyama is the only essence!' and 'I cast your image in the mould of my mind, O Shyama!' The Holy Mother liked the songs very much. Sitting near him Radhu, Maku, Nalini, one or two aunts and many others were listening to the singing. One of the aunts said, "Sister-in-law has made a monk of this boy. Such fine boys she turns into monks. With what difficulty their parents have brought them up, and pinned all their hopes on them! All that is shattered. Now he will either go to Rishikesh and beg for his food, or clean the dirt of patients in the name of service! To marry and set up a family also is a rule of creation. If you keep turning out monks like this, Mahamaya will be angry with you. If they want to be monks, let them do so by themselves. Why should they do so through your agency, aunt?" The Holy Mother replied, 'Maku, they are all children of the gods. They remain pure as flowers in the world. Can you tell what greater happiness is there than theirs? You know yourself what

happiness there is in worldly life! You know also the happiness of having a husband. Are you not ashamed to go to your husband again and again? What have you learnt, staying with me so long? Why so much infatuation, so much animality? What happiness do you enjoy? If you again approach your husband, I will send you away from here. Cannot a pure thought ever come to your mind even in a dream? Can you not even now live as brother and sister? Do you want to live like a pig? My bones burn in the fire of your worldly life." All hung their heads in shame.

The Holy Mother continued, "Whether a man calls on God or not, if he does not marry, he is already half liberated. When the mind happens to be a little attracted to God he will progress by leaps and bounds. Family life is the result of demerits. A man involved in it, even if he is inclined to God, cannot do anything about it. He is tied hand and foot."

Of late, almost every day, the Holy Mother was having slight fever. Her body was getting very weak. Revered Sarat Maharaj was trying to take her soon to Calcutta. But he had to go to Kasi on urgent matters. So when it was proposed at that time that she should go to Calcutta, she said, "When Sarat is not there, the question of my going to Calcutta does not arise at all. To whom should I go? When I am there, if Sarat should say, 'Mother, I am going elsewhere for a few days,' then I say, 'Wait a minute, my dear. First I shall move away from here and then you may go.' Other than Sarat who will bear my burden?"

It was winter and the Holy Mother's health was getting very bad. Even then she would, as usual, get up early in the morning at three. Finishing her ablutions, she would sit for some time on her bed, covering herself with her quilt and then lie down again. We used to enter her room, then close the door and sit silent in the darkness. The Holy Mother would perhaps say, "At such and such time, do Japa of such and such a Deity, in such and such a manner" etc. A little later came up the topic of some of our monks going to live with the householders when they fall ill. The Holy Mother said, "Just because of illness why should monks live with householders? There is the monastery. A monk is the ideal of renunciation. A monk should not associate with women. And for monks to accumulate money is absolutely bad. There is nothing that money cannot do—one may lose even one's life on account of it. There was a monk in Puri, living on the seashore. He had a little money. Getting scent of it, two disciples could not control their greed. They murdered the monk and went away with his money."

One day at about nine or ten, the Holy Mother was rubbing oil on her body. An attendant just then swept the place and threw the broom on one side. The Holy Mother noticed it and said, "What is that? The job is over and straightway you threw it off so carelessly! It will take just as little time to keep it properly as it takes to throw it away. Should you neglect a thing because it is small? Whatever you care for, will care for you also. Won't you need it again? That aside, in this family it also is a part. From that angle also it deserves a certain regard. Whatever regard a thing deserves, that must be accorded to it. Even the broom has to be replaced respectfully. An ordinary work too must be done with care and attention."

One day Radhu's dearest cat was lying at the edge of the yard. One woman was standing near by and was petting it with her foot. Gradually she placed her foot on its head also. The Holy Mother noticed it and said, "Oh dear, what are you doing? Head is the seat of the Guru. Should one place one's foot there? Salute it." The said woman responded, saying, "I never knew that, Mother. I came to know of it only now."

Some devotees came from Calcutta one morning, all tip-top. They were dressed expensively. They also brought a lot of fruits and other things for the Holy Mother. In the evening the Holy Mother was talking to herself, "They have taken the life out of me. I cannot bear any more. Some children come and my family is as if filled with peace and bliss. From somewhere vegetables and all other needed things come to hand. I never have to worry about anything. Whatever is ready, they quietly eat and get up, folding up the leaf plate. Ah, their spoken words also are like a balm to my heart. Now look at this! Since morning, I am in a turmoil. They brought a binful of fruits. And half of them are so rotten as to be fit only for manure. Where to throw these? I do not know. They wear such tip-top clothing and yet they say. 'I forgot to bring my towel. Where should I go to get a towel? Still I procured one. Now my worry is what I shall cook for the night. I learn further that there is no string for their mosquito nets. Hari is now searching for thread. O Master, you look after your family yourself. As for me, I can do no more. On one side is Radhi, and on the other are all these people." I recollect one or two incidents of how some devotees exasperated the Holy Mother.

The Mother was then at Jayrambati. A little before dusk I returned from Shyambazar and saw she was lying on a mat spread in the verandah. As soon

as I went, the Holy Mother said with vexation, "All of you are here, but you will have to go out upon works. Today some one came, Sri —, an elderly person. Seeing him from a distance, I went inside and sat on the cot. He made Pranam from the outside. That was all right. But he was anxious to take the dust of my feet. However much I objected and shrank back, he would not desist. In the end, more or less forcibly, he touched my feet and took the dust. Since then my feet are burning unbearably and I have mortal pain in the stomach. I washed my feet three or four times but still the burning sensation does not abate. If you were near, you would understand my sign and could have forbidden him. With regard to devotees, those boys in Calcutta are so strict. It won't do otherwise. How many types of people come! You are young boys, you cannot understand."

Finishing all out-door work, I came to the Holy Mother at dusk. She said, "Today evening B— brought a high Police Officer (she named him) to me. That man was of a peculiar nature—he came twirling his moustache and bowed down to me. He wanted to take the dust of my feet. I shrank back and could not by any means allow it. What a restless nature! And yet B—was there in front of me, praising him to the skies to his own face. On my part, I was on tenterhooks, wondering how to get rid of him. Finally I made some halwa and, giving it to him, sent him away."

One day the Holy Mother got up after Puja at the Udbodhan house. One devotee came with some flowers and went to pay his respects to her. At the sight of this stranger, the Mother covered her whole body with a shawl and sat there on the cot hanging her feet like a new bride. The devotee offered flowers at the Holy Mother's feet, bowed down and sat down cross-legged in front of her. Sitting there like a log of wood, he began Nyasa and Pranayama. Everyone in the house was busy and there was none near the Holy Mother. She was sweating profusely. Time passed.

Seeing that the devotee was worshipping the Holy Mother, Golap-Ma had gone elsewhere on some other work. When she returned some time after and saw the same devotee sitting in the same fashion, she could understand the whole situation. Laying hold of his arm, she pulled him up to his feet and said in her natural loud voice, "Are you before a Deity of wood that you are about to enliven it by your Nyasa and Pranayama? Have you no sense? Can you not see the Mother is perspiring and is in great discomfort?"

Once another devotee went to make Pranam to the Holy Mother and knocked his head with force on her big toe. The Mother cried out with pain and stood up. When he was asked why he did so, he replied, "I knocked my head on her foot and pained her. As long as the pain is there, so long will the Mother remember me." These two incidents, the Holy Mother narrated to us many times, to our great amusement.

As soon as revered Sarat Maharaj returned to Calcutta from Kasi, he sent an escort to bring the Holy Mother from Jayrambati. In due time, one morning she got ready for the journey with all her entourage. After every one had saluted her, K—Maharaj and H—bowed down to her. She gave them a cloth and a wrapper used by her and said, "Keep these." She placed her hand on their heads and blessed them, with tear-filled eyes. Then she started on her journey. I rode a bicycle alongside of her palanquin. On the way, in Sihore, the Holy Mother stopped the palanquin at the temple of Santinath Mahadev and offered Puja to Siva with two rupees worth of Sandesh, sugar and molasses. She then distributed the Prasad to all of us, took a little herself, and tied some at the end of her cloth for Radhu. All of us reached Koalpara in due time. That evening Radhu and other women started in bullock carts for Vishnupur. Next morning at five, when I went to the Mother at Jagadamba Ashram, she had just finished the Master's Puja with sweets and flowers, and was wrapping up his photo in a cloth and putting it in the box. She was saying to the Master, "Please rise. It is time to start." Seeing me, she said, "You have come! You are so late! It will soon be hot. Take this flower for the journey." Saying this she touched an offered flower to her head and gave it to me. Later she bade farewell to all and entered the palanquin. A little farther on she said, "Always keep near me and go attentively. Radhu's and Maku's jewels are all in Maku's palanquin." When we reached Jaypur, the Holy Mother stopped the palanquin. She got down at the inn, at which once we had cooked and taken our food on .our way to Jayrambati. Seeing it in a dilapidated state, she said laughing, "Ah, it is that same inn of ours." She spread a blanket near it and sat down. "Feed the bearers with something," she said and had two rupees worth of puffed rice given to them. She then warmed the milk for Maku's son and having washed her hands and feet in the pond in front, said, "Buy me also a pie worth of puffed rice. I'll chew a little. And for you and Maku, see if you can get some puffed rice fried in oil." I brought all these. The Holy Mother ate very little, and gave it away to us, saying, "I cannot chew anymore." After the bearers finished eating, they took up the palanquin. We crossed four miles of jungle and reached Tantipukur where we saw a few labouring class people making a hullabaloo

sitting near a small shop. I was thinking that it was best to cross this area as quickly as possible. Two miles farther we should reach a somewhat inhabited area and I could be free from worry to a great extent. But the Holy Mother peeped out from-her palanquin, saw the shop and said, "Stop the palanquin a little. Sitting here my legs have become numb. Bring me half a pice worth of oil in a leaf from the shop. I shall shampoo my feet." Hearing this, I was beset with fear. Finally I told her, "Here are some people who seem to be unruly. There is no point in your getting down. Please stay inside, and I shall bring the oil." Maku was saying at the same time, "I am thirsty after eating puffed rice. I want some water to drink." The Holy Mother replied, "Drink. Go to that pond and drink." I protested, "Drink that water! It is not at all good." The Holy Mother said, "So many people drink that water on their way. Nothing will happen, go. You go with her and bring her back." I got the oil for the Holy Mother and accompanied Maku for her drink of water. Immediately on our return we resumed our journey.

At about twelve in the noon we reached Sureswar Babu's house in Vishnupur. Sureswar Babu had passed away a few months earlier. The Holy Mother said, "Ah, whenever I would come here, my Suresh would always stand there with folded hands. Sometimes he could not climb the verandah even. What devotion he had! "That day we stayed at Vishnupur, and next day noon after finishing our meals we caught a train for Calcutta, and travelling third class, reached Udbodhan by about ten at night.

Yogen-Ma and Golap-Ma saw the Holy Mother's condition and exclaimed, "Oh, dear, what a Mother have you brought us! So black in complexion! You have brought us a few bones and skin! We could never imagine that the Mother's health was so bad.'" From the very next day, Revered Sarat Maharaj made all arrangements for her treatment.

By the treatment of Dr. Shyamadas Kaviraj, the Holy Mother was a little better for a few days. One evening some women devotees came to see her. One among them was quite gorgeous in her dress and ornaments. Referring to her, the Holy Mother said, "For a woman, modesty is her ornament. Flowers are best used in the service of the Lord. Otherwise it is better that they fade away on the trees. I feel very bad when I see foppish gentlemen make sometimes a bouquet of flowers or sometimes casually put a flower to their nose and admire: 'Ah! What fine scent!' Oh dear, perhaps the very next moment they throw it on the floor and trample it with booted feet."

One day Ramlal-Dada, Lakshmi-Didi and Ramlal-Dada's daughter came to the Holy Mother from Dakshineswar. They were on their way to the festival at Entally. Ramlal-Dada bowed down to the Holy Mother and went downstairs to Sarat Maharaj. At the request of the Holy Mother and others, Lakshmi-Didi sang in a low voice and simultaneously mimicked the sound of the play of Khol (a kind of drum) with her mouth, to the amusement of all. After that the following conversation took place about the Master's birthplace, the temple to be built there and connected matters.

Lakshmi-Didi: If it happens (if the temple comes up), it should be under our control, shouldn't it be? Their (Ramlal-Dada's and Sibu-Dada's) children will do Puja etc., and live there.

Mother: How can it be? These are all monks and devotees. Can they observe caste regulations? Ladies and gentlemen of so many countries will come here, stay here, and have their Prasad. We have to do with devotees alone. But you are householders. You have your society. You have to perform the marriage etc., of your children. Would it do for you to live along with them?

After conversing thus for a while the Holy Mother said, "Houses just like those you have now, but with corrugated iron roofing, will be built for you separately in another area, either near Yogis farm or somewhere on the western side."

Lakshmi-Didi: Then will Raghuvir and Sitala stay in the temple that is going to be built?

Mother: How is it possible? They are your family deities. On festival days your daughters and in-laws will have to worship them. That cannot be. For Raghuvir they will construct another temple. There will be left a small passage on the side so that the women can come and go. You, Ramlal or Sibu, when you go there, will be fed and accommodated in the temple with the devotees. What more worry is there for you?

Ramlal-Dada and others came upstairs to Sarat Maharaj's room. Ramlal-Dada and Lakshmi-Didi wholeheartedly agreed to the Holy Mother's proposal, and after listening to the whole arrangement, Sarat Maharaj also expressed his happiness.

When Ramlal-Dada and Lakshmi-Didi left, the Holy Mother called me and said, "Look, talking with Lakshmi I forgot to give her a cloth and money. You go with Krishnalal to Entally and see the festival and also give this cloth and money to Lakshmi. They decorate the Deity at Entally beautifully." Saying this, she took out two rupees and a cloth and gave them to me. Later she said, "Lakshmi used to imitate the singers and sing and dance before the Master, displaying all their postures. The Master said to me, 'That is her mood. Be careful that you do not lose your modesty trying to follow her example.' "

From Jayrambati a letter came one day, conveying the news that some native of that place took to robbery and was under arrest. Hearing this, the Holy Mother said, "Oh dear, did you hear? I knew that he was a robber. But with what affection I used to treat him and give him so many things! So he was obedient to me. He would be as harmless as an earthworm with me. I live there with the responsibility of these girls and their ornaments. As for you, there is never any certainty where you will be at any time. Wicked men must be kept at a distance, in whatever manner it may be."

The Holy Mother's illness was gradually worsening. The temperature would rise only to 102° or 102.5°, but because of the burning sensation in hands and feet, there was great restlessness. Regarding it, she had been saying repeatedly, "Take me to the Ganges bank. I shall be cooled on the Ganges bank." Revered Sarat Maharaj wanted to do as she wished. But the doctors forbade all movement in her present condition. One day the Mother told me, "You take Radhu and all their set to Jayrambati and leave them there." Radhu was the Holy Mother's second heart, so to speak. She could not part with her even for a moment. And today in her worsening state of health she was directing them to be sent to Jayrambati. What could be the matter?, we wondered. Gradually she was getting so much displeased with them that Nalini-Didi and others were afraid to go near her. Revered Sarat Maharaj tried to cajole the Holy Mother, "They will be unhappy to depart, leaving you in your days of illness. They will go after you get well a little." The Holy Mother replied, "It is better to send them away, so that they may never come near me again. I have no inclination to see even their shadow."

One day at noon Radhu was sleeping in a side room. Her child crawled over on all fours to the Holy Mother's bed and was trying to climb on her chest. The Mother looked at it and said, "I have cut off my attachment to you totally. Go now. You cannot bind me any more." To me she said, "Take

away this child elsewhere. I do not like all this any more." I took the child in my arms and gave it to its grandmother.

One day at Jayrambati when some one spoke rudely to the youngest aunt, she said, "What is that, dear? Should one speak such words as would hurt the feelings of another? Even if it is truth, it should not be told in an unpleasant manner. Finally, you will end up with that kind of nature. If one's sensitivity is lost, then nothing would control one's speech. The Master used to say, 'If you have to ask a lame man how he became lame, you must only say: How did your leg get bent this way?' "

Towards the end, the Holy Mother became so weak that she could not sit for long. But I noticed that she would be doing Japa even while lying down. Sometimes at Jayrambati I had to wake her up at one or two, at night in connection with some work or other. She would respond at the first call. When I enquired if she did not sleep, she would say, "What shall I do, my dear? My children come eagerly and take initiation. But some do nothing regularly; some others do nothing at all. I have taken up their burden, should I not look after them? And so I do Japa for them. I pray to the Master on their behalf, 'Oh Lord, arouse their spiritual consciousness. Give them liberation. This world is a well of sorrow and misery. See to it that they do not have to come to it again.'" Saying this, she would rise very slowly to a sitting position. She would continue, "With so much earnestness they take initiation. But why then are they not practising anything? Is it so difficult to do so? With a little practice one gets such joy! Ah, with what bliss Yogin-Ma and I used to do Japa for long hours at Vrindaban! Mosquitoes would cause eruptions on our faces, but we were unaware of it all."

One day the Holy Mother said, "However much of Japa you do, however much of work you perform all is for nothing. If Mahamaya does not open the way, is anything possible for anyone? Oh bound soul! Surrender, surrender. Then alone will She take compassion on you and leave your path open." Saying this, she told an incident in the Master's life at Kamarpukur. "One day in the month of Jyeshta, there was a heavy rain one evening. The whole field was covered with water. The Master was going along the main road near Dompada wading in the water. There, seeing that many fish had accumulated, people were beating them to death with sticks. One fish kept going round and round the Master's feet. Noticing it, he said, 'Hey, do not kill this fish. It is going round my feet, surrendering itself to me. If anybody can, let him take this fish and set it free in the pond.' Then he himself set it

free and came home and said, 'Ah, if anyone could surrender in this manner, then alone can he find protection.'"

The End